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The campaign in Burma

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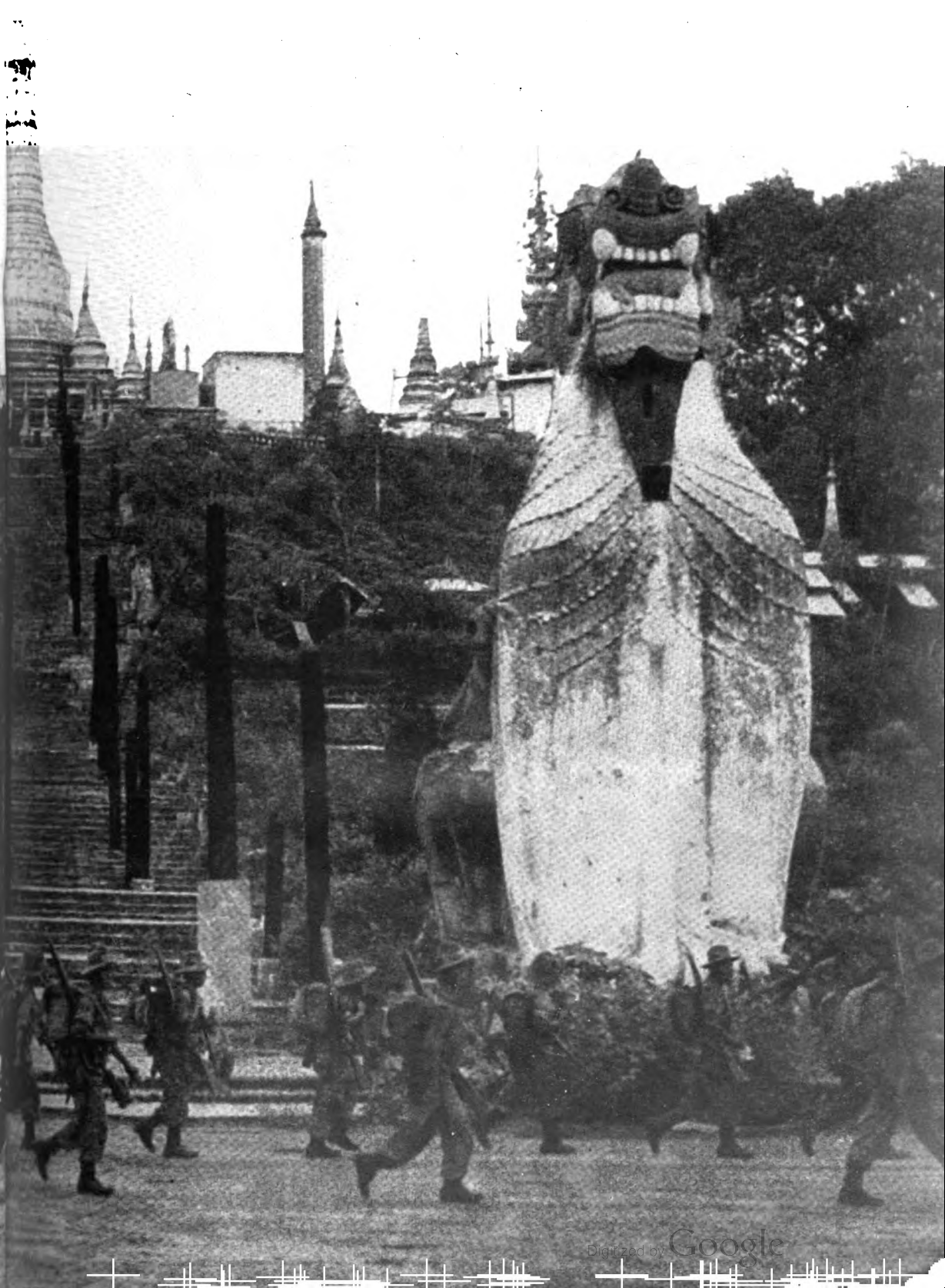
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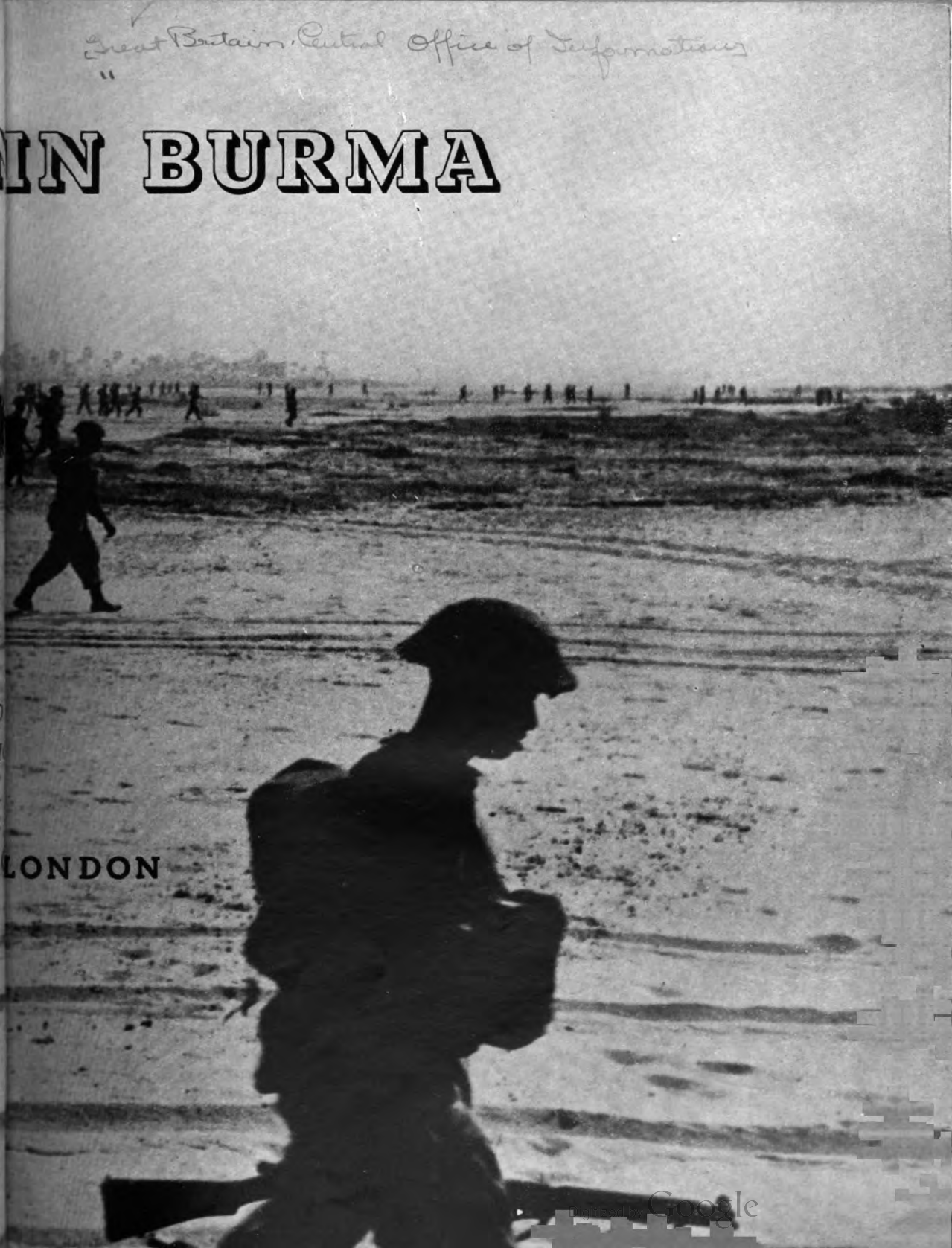

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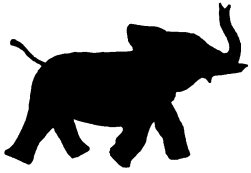

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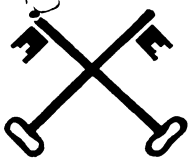
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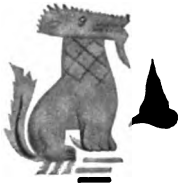
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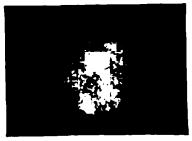
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THE PICTURES

The book contains 93 photographs taken during the campaign. (For the pictures on pp. 22, 38–39, 40–41, 42, 80–81, 85, 86–87, the editors are indebted to *Time and Life*.)

THE MEN

Of the various strengths in the field there were: Indian 340,000, British 100,000, West and East African 90,000, Chinese 65,000, American 10,000. 47 U.S. Air Squadrons took part and 51 British (including R.A.F., I.A.F., R.C.A.F., and R.A.A.F. units). The traditional composition of an Indian Division is two Indian Army brigades and one British Army brigade.

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25 INDIAN DIV.

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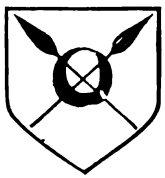
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Prome Road, January 1942. The Japanese were in Burma and refugees were streaming along the roads before them. The barefoot men clasp a few possessions to their heads ; the boy has nothing but his terror.

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I. THE RETREAT

1. THE BRIDGE

AN ARMY is moving along a jungle track. The sun has sunk behind the trees, and shadows hem in the procession. The step is not lively, nor is it easy to keep, for the soldiers' footfalls make no sound in the dust that lies deep upon the road. Being scuffled up, this dust hangs also in a cloud over the heads of the column. The soldiers feel dust, they breathe it, and they would swallow it if they did not keep their mouths shut. This is another reason for not talking.

Interspersed with the companies of riflemen are other soldiers leading mules and donkeys. A few ox-drawn carts lumber by, piled with goods and gear. The oxen plod at their own pace, which is eternally and immutably two miles an hour, and that is fast enough for the marching men.

Occasionally comes a convoy of trucks and gun-limbers, stirring the silence with their groaning in low gear. The convoy drivers wish to move faster. But the track is narrow, and march discipline forbids overtaking; motor transport also will conform with the oxen. Every so often there is a check as part of the procession is held up. Then voices sound, lamps flash, a car weaves its way through the halted columns to the traffic block. The infantry can hardly spare the breath to curse this fresh affliction. Their officer will not order them to fall out by the wayside if he can avoid it, for he knows that if some men get off their feet they are unlikely to get back on to them. This is an army in retreat.

Review the troops as they approach. Red eyes, grey faces, beards, their shirts torn with jungle thorns, striped black with to-night's wet sweat and white with yesterday's dried salt of sweat. Water-bottles rattle from their belts, as dry as their own lips. Many an ammunition pouch is empty, too, for these troops have come out of a four days' battle. Dirt and blood stain the rags that bind their wounds. They have been marching with short halts for the past 24 hours, and there has been no time to wash, even if there was water. These soldiers are marching towards another battle.

A few miles ahead, in his headquarters at Kyaikto town jail, is their leader, Major-General J. G. Smyth, V.C., M.C., Commander of the 17th Indian Division, a tenacious little soldier, wrestling with a large problem. These are his troops who are retreating along the coast of Burma towards Rangoon, and Smyth's concern is lest their only road back will be destroyed. For 22 days 17 Div. has been withdrawing, bombed and machine-gunned from the air, attacked in flank and rear, and already acquainted with that ace-bogy of Japanese tactics—the road-block thrown across the path of its retreat and covered with mortar and

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machine-gun fire. On two rivers, the Salween and the Bilin, 17 Div. has stood and fought, halting the enemy. Now its men have been ordered to retire beyond the Sittang, the third and last moat between the Japanese invaders and Rangoon, main British base in Burma.

Two anxieties beset the Divisional Commander's mind. The first is: Have his sappers made the Sittang Bridge, designed for railway traffic only, capable of bearing road vehicles? The second question is: Will the enemy seize the bridge before 17 Div. can reach it? A Japanese force of undisclosed strength is already moving round the northern flank, and on the south there is threatened the landing of seaborne parties. The British commander cannot spare the troops to frustrate these operations; to warn him of their development along the coast he relies on a thin screen of the Burma Frontier Force.

The maximum available air cover has been promised to the division as it retreats. But in the Battle of Burma of February 1942 many holes gape in this brave umbrella. Attacked in his own headquarters both by Japanese aircraft and at dawn by raiders infiltrating from a party landed on the coast, the Divisional Commander realises it is going to be a close thing. He gets into his car and drives to the river.

At dusk hopes rise. The sappers have done their job, and the bridge is decked to take road traffic. Smyth inspects the defences and orders the 4th Gurkhas over to the western bank to guard the fields there against a possible paratroop attack. During the evening a staff officer has arrived from Army Headquarters to tell him that the 7th Armoured Brigade, one of the finest in the British Army, is disembarking at Rangoon, and though all the port labourers have fled from the Japanese bombing the tanks will soon be coming up.

The stream of vehicles bearing wounded, stores and rations begins to cross the river. By now the Bridge has become something in the minds of the troops retreating towards it. Ordered, urged, goaded on, they realise that the bridge means escape—or else a more terrible and perhaps final road-block. So all down the track, as the leading files start off, exhausted soldiers drag themselves out of the ruts where they have dozed as they stood. An army of sleepwalkers moves towards the bridge.

Suddenly, at 3 a.m., all traffic is halted. A lorry has overturned on the centre span, blocking movement either way. By the light of flares and the moon the sappers toil to clear the path. Three hours pass before the flow can be resumed. At daybreak the rear section of Divisional Headquarters has just crossed to the western bank when there is a burst of firing from the jungle skirting the road. It is the Japanese encircling force coming in on the north flank. The road to the bridge is blocked.

So begins the Battle of Sittang, the last and bloodiest of the Battles of the Rivers, and, from the opening shots, the most confused. Smyth says: "It was a dog-fight in the jungle. Nobody above the rank of company commander could exercise any control." Almost immediately the perimeter defences were overrun, but as promptly they were recaptured by their garrison. Beyond, along the jungle track, the rear brigades heard the firing, and again deployed for action. The Japanese had already interposed a wedge between them and the bridgehead. All contact, even of sight, had vanished, for the Japanese held the high ground commanding the approaches to the bridge. Within a few hours they had also split the two marching brigades by throwing a road-block between them.

Now the fog of war wrapped itself about the struggle on the Sittang. Though the bridgehead troops did not realise it, the Gurkhas of the leading isolated brigade almost seized the whole of the ridge above them. They were forced off Buddha Hill only when their ammunition ran out. A second mishap befell when the artillery of the same brigade, grouped at Mokpalin railway station less than a mile away, in pounding the Japanese positions on Pagoda Hill, compelled our own bridgehead garrison beyond it to retire across the river. This situation was retrieved when the 4th Gurkhas, returning with the bayonet, re-established the perimeter.

Meantime, the road-block in the jungle had been by-passed and the remainder of the retreating troops were concentrating around Mokpalin, where they formed a "box" which on its western side abutted on the river. It was not possible, however, to see the bridgehead, even from here.

The Japanese pressure everywhere increased, especially against the bridge. Four hours after midnight, the most dreaded possibility of all threatened to become a fact: the bridge might fall. If it did, two Japanese divisions would

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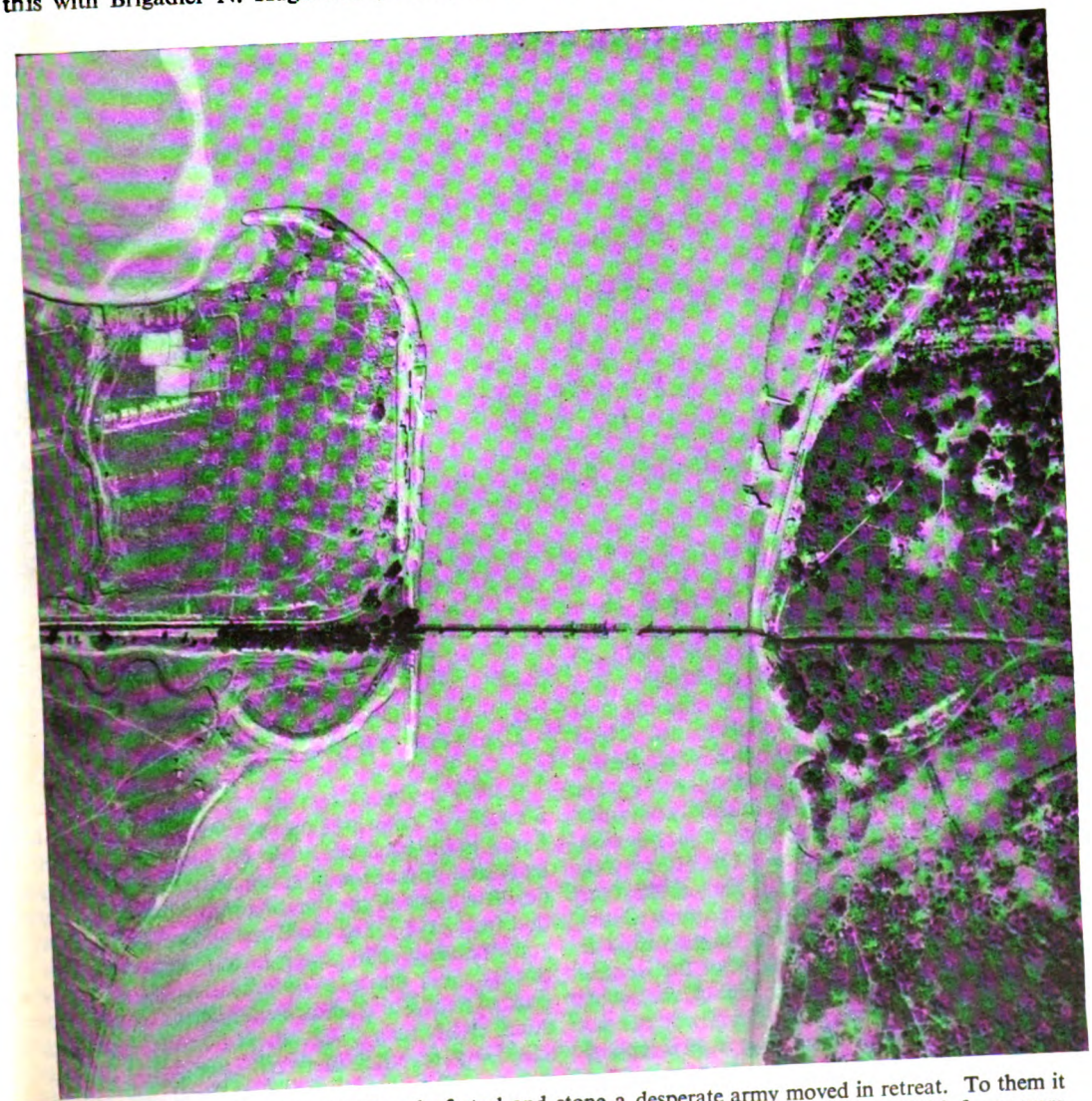
drive straight on Rangoon, brushing aside the weak formations in their path. The event would also strand two-thirds of the almost exhausted 17th Div. on the far side of a river 800 yards wide, at the mercy of the enemy. On the other hand, if the bridge were blown it would at any rate be denied to the enemy. Smyth had discussed all this with Brigadier N. Hugh-Jones, M.C., who commanded at the bridge. He had empowered him to take the decision on the spot, himself accepting full responsibility. The moment had now arrived.

At 4.30 a.m. Smyth's field telephone awakened him. It was Hugh-Jones to say that he could not guarantee to hold the bridge beyond an hour. The choice had to be made; it was the more



The Life-line. Towards this thread of steel and stone a desperate army moved in retreat. To them it was a way of escape: to the pursuing Japanese a way of invasion. Two-thirds of the British forces were still fighting a rearguard battle when a threat to the bridge compelled the commander to blow it up, stranding his own troops on the far bank. This picture, taken in 1944, shows the Sittang Bridge still under repair.

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appalling because the previous day, during the crisis on the bridge, the sappers had been directed to destroy the two-engined ferries and about 300 sampans which had been collected on the west bank. "Blow the bridge!" was the order. The centre span was blown an hour later under close fire.

A profound silence followed the explosion. Then a storm of excited chatter and yells rose from the Japanese lines. The effect on the isolated British-Indian brigades can be imagined: the fate of these troops was now sealed, and the disorder of the battle was complete. Nevertheless, disciplined units held to their ranks and their duty. At Mokpalin they had received their first (and only) wireless signal, "Friends waiting to welcome you at the East Gate." Thus assured that the forces on the far bank would give them covering fire for their crossing, the men in the Mokpalin box set to work furiously to build rafts while their comrades in the firing line held off the enemy assaults. These were now redoubled, for the Japanese had no longer need to press towards the shattered bridge. They concentrated their mortars and aircraft on Mokpalin for the kill.

For several hours they were held up, the British gunners firing over open sights. But about noon the pressure became irresistible, and Brigadier J. K. Jones gave the order to begin the evacuation. It was a grim job. From Pagoda Hill, which crowns the escarpment on the east bank, enemy fire swept the river. Surprisingly few British soldiers can swim, and still fewer Indians, and even for those who could the chances of reaching the western bank were small unless the men stripped off their clothing and equipment and threw away their arms. Tired men sank in the mud and were choked there; many were shot in the water, and still more were drowned, some helping wounded comrades across by pushing them on logs and bamboo rafts. Almost all who reached the other bank were in a state of collapse. The exhaustion of the Japanese permitted the Divisional Commander to run lorries and even trains within a mile or two of the river. The feet of the British soldiers, unused to marching barefoot, were cut to pieces on the stones of the railway track. Naked, bleeding, and weary, they were wrapped in blankets and borne away in the slow agony of a Burma train.

So the two "sacrificed" brigades came over the Sittang. All their artillery and transport (which they had held on to until now) and most of their equipment had been lost. Many units had been shattered and some had disappeared. The day after the Battle of the Sittang ended, 17 Div. numbered 3,350 men and 149 officers; it could muster only 1,420 rifles. The gravity of this reverse is not to be concealed. Our casualties were double those of the enemy and the moral effect of the disaster on the Sittang was as damaging as the physical losses. Yet at this high cost something had been saved. The Japanese blow at Rangoon had been delayed another fortnight, and this was vital to the campaign, for it enabled the evacuation and destruction of the port to be carried out methodically. Above all, it permitted rearming, reclothing and regrouping of the British forces and their further withdrawal towards the north, where the 1st Burma Division under Major-General Bruce Scott and the Chinese forces under Lieutenant-General Joseph Stilwell were taking up their positions.

And 17 Div.? The shattered units of the Sittang lived to fight many another day. These same men would continue in this campaign another 80 days, would march 800 more miles through jungle, sand and swamp. They would arrive at last on the mountain frontier of India, battered but unbroken and still fighting on their feet, bearing their weapons and their wounded. And then, out of this remnant of a rearguard would rise once more an unconquerable army.

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2. THE SHIELD OF INDIA

BURMA is shaped like a hand, with a long forefinger pointing south. Most of the hand is an extension of that mountain mass of Central Asia, desolate home of the llamas and the panda bears, that men have called the Roof of the World. As your hand divides itself into fingers so does Burma split up into ranges stretching southward. Between them are the valleys with their three chief rivers, Chindwin, Irrawaddy and Salween; together they make up four-fifths of Burma. The other fifth is that forefinger, which is the coastal strip known as Tenasserim. It reaches far down the western shore of the Malay Peninsula, towards Singapore.

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The Mountain Wall. Not here the central plains of paddy-fields and pagodas, where armies moved swiftly in retreat or advance, but the jungle mountains, soaking among the rain-clouds, where men of the Fourteenth Army cut roads out of the cliffs, and lived for two years, and fought their hardest battles.

Burma interposes itself between the rest of Malaya and India; also between Southern China and India. It is not a corridor between any of these lands, but a barrier. This is the military significance of Burma, and it is why there was a Burma campaign.

Japan's surge of conquest, piling up from Pearl Harbour to Singapore, swept the Americans, British and Dutch from their holdings in the South-West Pacific in little more than a hundred days of cataclysm. Within a week of Pearl Harbour the Japanese had burst into Burma, too, for Burma forms the natural strategic shield of these conquests. The Himalayas seal off the north; the mountains which extend down the length of Burma form successive ramparts against assault from the west. Once conquered, the Japanese High Command reckoned that the only way that attack could come upon this Burma "barrier land" was from the south through the port of Rangoon.

The Japanese poured in across the south-eastern frontiers from Siam. Overwhelming resistance, or rushing round it as a tide floods up between the sandbanks, they reached the head of the Burmese river valleys under the northern arc of mountains, and there they established their front. The force and speed of their oncoming split the hastily assembled British-Chinese army into its several parts. The British retreated across

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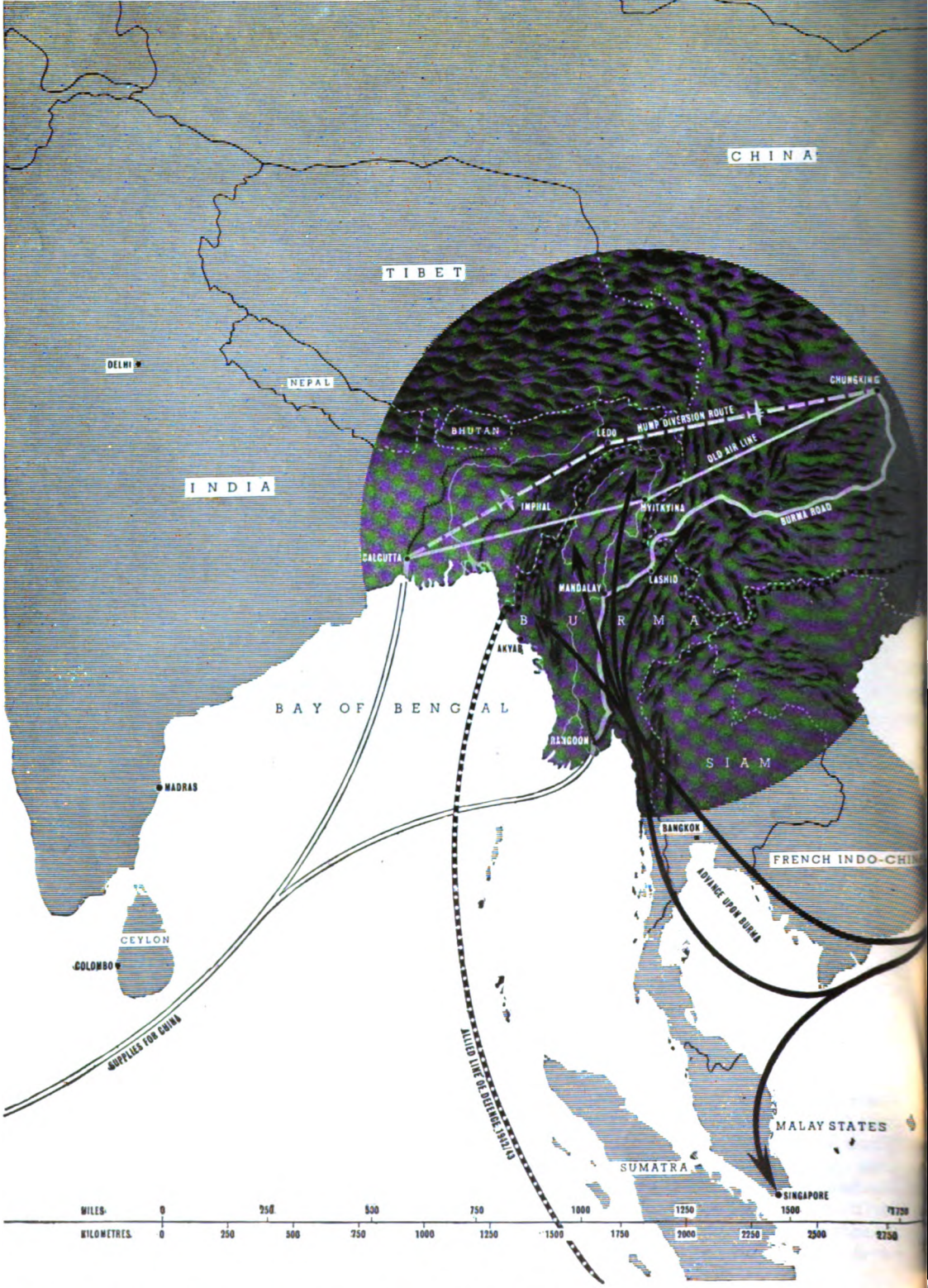

BURMA THE ROAD-BLOCK. *Burma is a southward extension of the mountains of Asia known as the Roof of the World; it is a barrier of rivers, hills and jungles, a vast road-block thrust between India and Southern China. With its Burma Road, and its old air line running through Myitkyina, it was also China's back door. When the Japanese came sweeping west, early in* **1942,** *the impetus of their attack carried them naturally to* **Burma.** *Here*

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they had three objects : to protect their gains in South-West Pacific, to cut off China from her western supplies, and to mount an invasion of India. The campaign in Burma defeated those plans. China was never quite isolated ; a new road was forced through from the north and a new air line flew over the "Hump." And the Allied armies, fighting back from the frontiers, turned the invasion of India into a Japanese retreat that ended in Singapore.

the Chindwin River and over the jungle ranges into India. The Chinese withdrew up the wild gorges of the Salween into the fastnesses of Yunnan.

So Burma was added to Japan's glittering crown of conquest, Hong Kong, Indo-China, Siam, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines and Singapore, "the greatest land-grab in history." The Burma Road, China's last land link with her Western Allies, was severed, and a wedge of mountain and malarial jungle was driven between them. Apart from its strategic values, the prize of Burma was worth the effort. The valley and delta of the Irrawaddy are a paddy-field from which in peaceful days seven million tons of rice were harvested. The crop solved a local military problem, for the rice-eating Japanese garrison was able to live off its conquest. Allied troops, who eat different kinds of food, had to be supplied from far-away Indian bases, often with air-dropped rations. Much of the war of supply in Burma was between the parachute and the paddy-field.

Rice is not all the riches of Burma. On the banks of the Lower Irrawaddy rise the derricks of the Yenangyaung oilfields. Before the war their output was 250,000,000 gallons per year, and though the British scorched the fields and blasted the plant as they retreated, denying this supply of petroleum to the enemy, it would have been a precious asset to their own mobility if they had been able to retain it. More vital to Japan were the Mawchi mines near the Salween River, the largest single source of wolfram in the world.

The occupation of the inner basin of Burma gave the Japanese two other advantages in the conduct of their subsequent operations. In the first place they held the areas least affected by either monsoon or malaria, and both of these are major afflictions to troops serving in them. Secondly, the Japanese commanded a far better system of land communications in their territory than the Allies did.

There is a wet zone in the north of Burma and another in the south. The dry zone is in the central part in the valley of the Lower Irrawaddy, and this was the main base of the Japanese power in Burma. The monsoon, a cyclonic circulation, is born in the Bay of Bengal in May. Part of it flows towards the mountains of the India-Burma frontier. Variations in the monsoon are governed by the angle at which the cloud strikes the mountains; if you live on the windward slope you will get most of the rain. So 500 inches annually descend on Charapunge in Assam, making it the wettest place on earth. At Shillong, a few miles away but on the opposite side of the range, the rainfall is below 60 inches. The fate of the Allies once they had lost Burma was that the greater part of their operational area was either in the hills which broke up the monsoon clouds, or on the windward side of them.

The climate is not everywhere as damp as at Charapunge, but in Arakan, for example, where the monsoon blows straight in from the Bay of Bengal and smashes at once against the coastal mountains, the troops had to fight under a downpour of 200 inches a year, all of which is concentrated into the five-months rainy season. Since Manchester endures about 27 inches over twelve months, it will be realised that Arakan is no sun-trap during the summer. The monsoon ends in October, and from then on it is dry and even cold until the hot, pre-monsoon season from March to May.

The malaria map of Burma can be charted as clearly, and along almost the same lines. The Lower Irrawaddy is healthy, North Burma is pestilent. Some parts of the country are so malarial that both armies once assiduously avoided fighting in them; the power of the mosquito, not of the enemy, was frequently the deciding factor in planning operations.

"Malaria has conquered empires and can cripple armies," said the Supreme Allied Commander, Admiral Mountbatten, in his address to the Press at the Ministry of Information in August 1944. He quoted the startling figure of 250,000 casualties in Burma from sickness in that year, most of these being from malaria and dysentery. But thanks to the zeal and skill of the British and American medical services, Mountbatten claimed that 90 per cent. of the patients reported fit for duty after three weeks. Thus, the destroyer of armies was reduced to its civilian status, which is little worse than a sharp dose of 'flu. This defeat of the mosquito did not take place, however, until after nearly two years of the jungle war.

The second factor which favoured the enemy once he had gained possession of Burma was its threefold river, road and rail system. In their lower reaches the waterways are the country's chief means of transport. The Irrawaddy is navigable for paddle-steamers as far north as

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Bhamo, and river craft go up the gorges to Myitkyina, 1,000 miles from the sea. Other rivers flow roughly parallel to the Irrawaddy, forming a further line of communication from the port of Rangoon to the northern frontier. Burma's main railway also runs, by a different route, from Rangoon to Myitkyina via Mandalay. The road system of the country is based on the two highways which link Rangoon and Mandalay, the one following the railway, the other the river. The first of these reaches Lashio, where it joins the Burma Road. The other peters out beyond Mandalay. So there was no road to India, which lies another 200 miles farther on through a jungle almost without a track. The Allies could neither reinforce by land in Burma after the fall of Rangoon, nor could their retreating army extricate themselves except by marching through this wilderness.

Communications were little better on the Indian side of the frontier. There, the British also possessed a railway which ran roughly parallel with the front, but so far away that it could only be tapped effectively at three points. These lay at Chittagong, for the Arakan sector; at Dimapur, for the Manipur sector; and at Ledo, in the north. To reach any of these military railheads the railway from the main Allied base at Calcutta, besides changing to narrow gauge, had to cross the Lower Ganges or the Brahmaputra. Neither river was bridged, and so men and material had to be detrained, ferried across (or shipped downstream for many miles), and then re-entrained on the far bank. The crossings are half a mile wide, the race is eight knots, and the monsoon flood rises 37 feet. From railhead onward to their outpost line on the frontiers of Arakan and Manipur the British had to build roads through swamp and forest, along precipices, winding 8,000 feet up into the clouds, and continuing along the entire length of the front. Until these were made, hardly a road, and certainly no metalled one, existed in Manipur; they were the work of IVth Corps' Indian sappers and pioneers, aided by tea-planters' labour. Later would come the Americans with their massive mechanical apparatus, driving their Ledo Road down from the north. These earlier highways, hacked out largely by hand and in a few months, remain marvels of military engineering, and what is more, they remained roads for longer. No single line of communication ran straight back towards India from Arakan or Manipur. Between the army and its bases in Bengal towered mountains and scores of lesser ridges laced with streams. The jungle matted the land. There would come a day when these obstacles would be overleapt by a magnificent air transport organisation. But that was not in Burma at the close of 1941.

The military situation was as black as could possibly be imagined. The British Empire was stretched almost to the limit of its strength by the war against the Axis. Nearly everything else that could be scraped together had been sent to Singapore. In Burma, to defend a land the size of Germany, and with one-hundredth of its communications, the British had two divisions, neither of them at full strength or tested in battle. Even when reinforcements arrived, out of a total force of 50,000 it is estimated that about half were combat troops. Seven thousand were British and 20,000 Indian, the rest being raised in Burma largely from among the hill tribes. These local units were in various elementary stages of training, some were ravaged with malaria, undermanned and under-equipped. The 17th Indian Division, who met the first impact of the Japanese invasion, had been trained for open warfare in the African desert, and such transport as it possessed was wheeled, and unsuited to jungle tracks. Two of its three brigades had been already diverted to Singapore; they were replaced by others composed of assorted units. This scratch division was pitted against the best-trained jungle troops then existing in the world.

The Allied forces in Burma were lacking in supporting arms, anti-aircraft guns, pack transport and wireless. Major-General Smyth reported he was so short of wireless sets he could only allocate one per battalion, and these were unwieldy pieces incapable of being moved off a metalled road. There was not much use in pushing out patrols into the jungle to locate the enemy, for he arrived on the heels of the runner who was bringing the information. When calling for air support, Smyth had to put in a telephone call through civilian post office exchanges. This air cover was entrusted to a few R.A.F. Brewster Buffaloes and Blenheims, aided by Colonel Claire Chennault's dashing American Volunteer Group, who happened to be in Rangoon fitting out for service in China when the Japanese delivered their Pearl Harbour blow. The fighter aircraft defence of India itself at this period amounted to eight old

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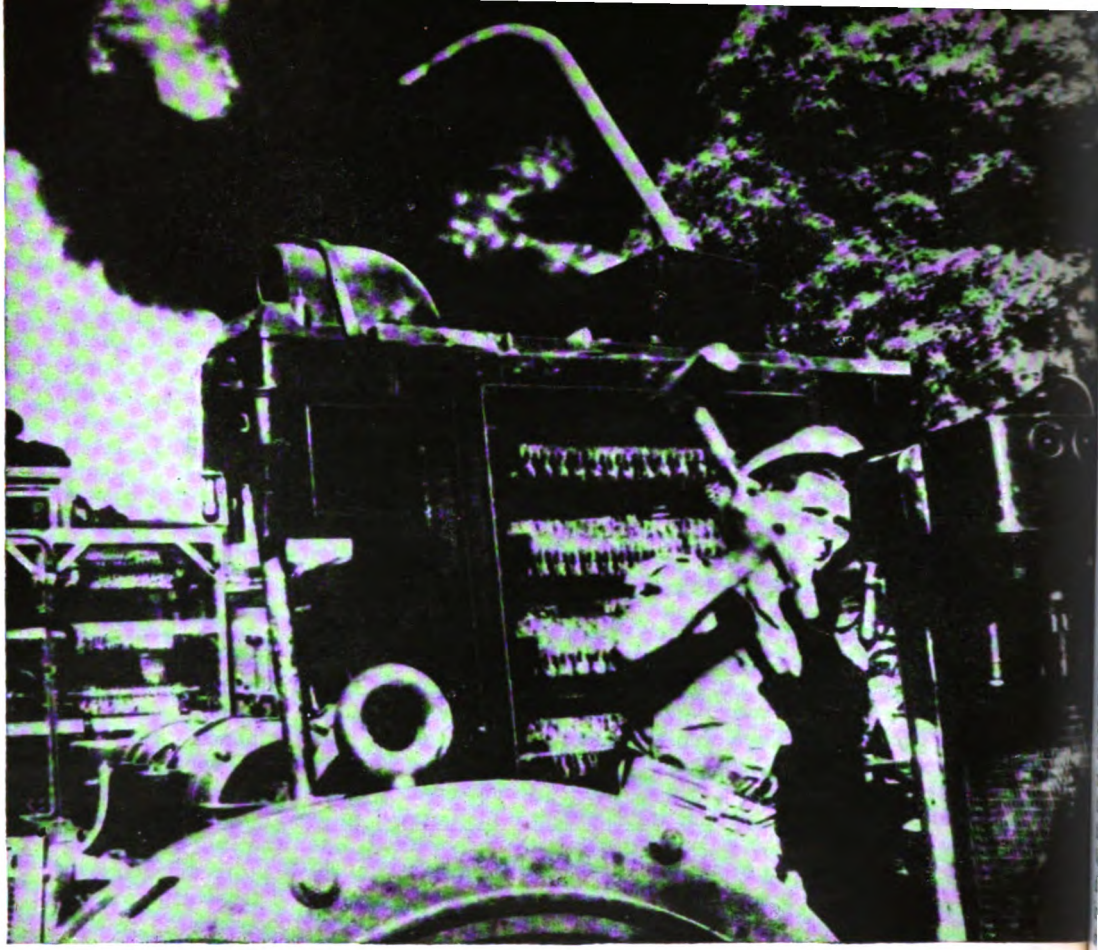

Mohawks stationed at Calcutta. Not a single bomber squadron was available for operations and no heavy bases existed along the India-Burma border. The armoured elements on hand were some old carriers and armoured cars used for training.

The thin British garrison was strung out to guard the eastern frontier of Burma from the Shan States bordering on Indo-China to Victoria Point at the far end of Tenasserim strip, 800 miles away, as well as to defend Rangoon. The reason for this distribution of forces was that in December 1941 the British still held Malaya, and the chain of airfields, Tavoy, Mergui and Victoria Point, which lay along the Tenasserim coast, was regarded as essential for the operations in Malaya. They were garrisoned with a few companies of Burma Rifles. A brigade was pushed 60 miles towards the Siamese frontier east of Moulmein, the port at the mouth of the Salween River. The Commander of 17 Div. took up his headquarters in Moulmein itself. He had a Divisional reserve of one battalion.

Moulmein boasted an airport, with quays and warehouses, and was an important local market. It was surrounded on three sides by tidal estuaries and on the fourth by jungle. From the point of view of defence there was nothing to recommend it, for while all these waterways could be crossed by boat and raft the shortest perimeter which would include the airport and the communication lines with Martaban, railhead to Rangoon on the western bank of the estuary, was 25 miles. To defend Moulmein and—once the enemy came within range—run the modest public services of the town, the British disposed about 3,000 troops

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Destroying as they went, the Allies left a scorched earth behind them. The Japanese, racing to win the rich oilfields of Central Burma, found only a wrecked and blazing inferno. Left, a British rearguard smashing machinery before throwing it into a burning oil pit.

3. BURMA FALLS

THE JAPANESE were not long in coming. They had concentrated on Siam before they struck at Pearl Harbour. A week later they crossed the frontier of Southern Burma and took Victoria Point. On December 23rd they sent over 80 aircraft to bomb the great port of Rangoon. Though they did little material damage, they killed more than 2,000 people, and created such a stampede that another 100,000 citizens fled overnight, leaving the docks and railways deserted. Fires broke out and destroyed the homes of many more. On Christmas Day they came again. The R.A.F. and American Volunteer Group fought the raiders, bringing down 52 for the loss of two defending aircraft in the two attacks. For a month the Japanese drew off and comparative peace descended upon the place. "Life in the city is returning to normal," reported the local newspaper. "Daylight robberies have started again."

By land the Japanese pressed on. Naturally, they did not advance in a direct northward line from Victoria Point up Tenasserim strip, for this would have enabled the Allied Forces to conduct an orthodox rearguard action. Instead, the Japanese struck in from Siam on the east, slicing off the defending garrisons one by one. The road-blocks thrown across the rear which the enemy used later on were a variation of this tactic. Their strategy in the first part of the campaign was simply a large-scale development of it—they aimed to cut all the roads and railways north of Rangoon and stage a second Singapore.

The British garrison at Tavoy were first overrun in this advance, on January 19th, 1942, and that of Mergui escaped the same fate only by a midnight sea evacuation. The brigade posted on the Siamese frontier was dive-bombed and driven back on Martaban. These troops, too, got away by the narrowest margin, blocking the pursuit by dynamiting the road behind them at the point where it was a ledge in the face of the cliff. The port of Moulmein held out only twenty-four hours. The troops fought their way down to the quays, where they were packed on to every kind of craft and ferried across the three-mile-wide estuary of the Salween to Martaban. The operation was carried out, mainly by civilian crews, with skill and courage in daylight, and under intense fire.

The Japanese at once began to swim or raft across the river higher up, and descend by jungle paths on the rear of Martaban, which they also bombed and shelled from the eastern bank. A threat to the line of retreat caused the British defenders to pull out. They held the invaders for a time at Kuzeik, where the 7th/10th Baluchs, a raw battalion, were encircled. They behaved with veteran coolness, and, when their Commanding Officer was lost, fought on in groups until they were annihilated.

The orders of 17 Div. were to conduct a delaying action until Rangoon could be reinforced. It was now plain that if any part of the division was to be preserved it must be withdrawn to a new line behind the Bilin River. Here was fought for four days one of the fiercest battles of the first Burma campaign. The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry ("Koylies") and the 4th, 5th and 7th Gurkhas especially distinguished themselves. Though outnumbered, the British held fast until Army Headquarters ordered the division to withdraw. This decision was imperative, for during these four days at Bilin a fresh Japanese division was forging through the jungle to the north, bent on cutting them off at the Sittang.

Over Rangoon, meantime, the Japanese air force had resumed operations. The R.A.F. strength was by now reduced to three Hurricanes, 10 Blenheims and 43 Buffaloes. With the A.V.G. they had brought down more than 200 enemy aircraft, exacting a six-to-one casualty rate. But Rangoon burned. Once more a multitude of refugees poured down the roads from the city, crammed the outgoing trains, and fled into the jungle.

The rear had disintegrated even as the rearguard fought its way in towards the Sittang Bridge. The "E" evacuation warning signal was hoisted on February 20th, 1942, and an

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exodus gave the capital of Burma over to fire and the looters. The Governor, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, remained with his senior officials, preparing a demolition of the port and power-house. At this midnight of disaster, troopships and transports of the 7th Armoured Brigade drew alongside the quays, and the 7th Hussars, 2nd Royal Tank Regiment and a battalion of the Cameronians began disembarking their Stuart tanks and carriers. They rendered incalculable service during the rest of the campaign. Indeed, these 150 tanks probably saved the army, for they convoyed or carried thousands of troops out of encirclement, broke the Japanese road-blocks, held at bay the Japanese armour, and acted as the artillery of the rearguard all the way northward to the frontier of India.

The last days of Rangoon were at hand. Singapore had fallen, releasing Japanese troops and air forces from Malaya. But it was the loss of sea power which decided the issue. With Singapore there passed also the command of the Indian Ocean; Rangoon became indefensible, and without Rangoon the British Army in South Burma could not be supplied at that period since there were no land links with India. There remained one feasible plan—to withdraw the army towards the north. This promised that it would (*a*) cover the road to India, (*b*) enable the scorching of the oilfields along the line of retreat, and (*c*) allow the Chinese time to give aid with troops from the neighbouring province of Yunnan. This last need was desperate. The Japanese had opened their campaign in Burma with two or three infantry regiments. They increased these until they numbered four divisions and two tank regiments. Altogether the Japanese deployed in Burma about 70,000 troops, and these were veterans of the China wars. Exploiting the initiative, they always contrived a local superiority.

There has been some criticism that the expedient of bringing in Chinese was not adopted earlier, and it is charged that the delay was due to British unwillingness to permit any troops except their own to enter Imperial territory to defend it. But to shift many thousands of troops 800 miles southward over mountain roads with the meagre transport that then existed in Burma was a feat that might have exercised the greatest of quartermasters. Transportation was not the only scarcity; the Chinese armies, fighting Japan for more than four desperate years, were short of arms, ammunition, equipment, medical supplies, and even food. There was also a political problem involved: if Chinese troops should enter Burma, who should command whom among Allies?

This question had already arisen before the Japanese invaded Burma. Three weeks after Pearl Harbour, General Wavell, then C.-in-C., India, flew from Rangoon to Chungking to see the Generalissimo, Marshal Chiang Kai-shek. As a result of this meeting the Generalissimo agreed that the American Volunteer Group of fighter pilots, intended to reinforce China's slender air power, should remain in Rangoon to aid its defence. This they did with honour to themselves and havoc to the enemy. Lend-lease supplies lying in Rangoon harbour and consigned to China via the Burma Road were also diverted to the use of the British Imperial forces. Still more solid evidence of Chiang Kai-shek's grasp of Japan's strategy was his offer to detach the 5th and 6th Chinese Armies for the defence of Burma. The reasons have been given why this reinforcement could not more promptly be made available.

A series of negotiations was required to settle the question of command. These were initiated on December 30th, 1941, when President Roosevelt proposed to Chungking that Marshal Chiang Kai-shek should take command of the forces of the United Nations in China, "including such parts of Indo-China and Siam as might become accessible to our troops." This formula led to the appointment of an American officer as Chief of Staff to the Generalissimo's Supreme Command in the China theatre. Since the Chinese troops which were to be brought into Burma were to be under the British C.-in-C. there, it was deemed proper to appoint a senior American officer as liaison between the Chinese and British commanders. At this point there enters into the story of the Burma war the remarkable figure of General Joseph W. Stilwell.

Stilwell is a West Pointer who fought in World War I, and thereafter spent many years of service in the Philippines and in China, where he was Chief of Staff to the U.S. 15th Infantry. He mastered the Chinese language. Stilwell is known to the world as "Vinegar Joe," though his troops called him "Uncle Joe," and it is a question which he preferred. He is 64 years old, canny, caustic, and as craggy as they come. On the table in his jungle headquarters tent stood a

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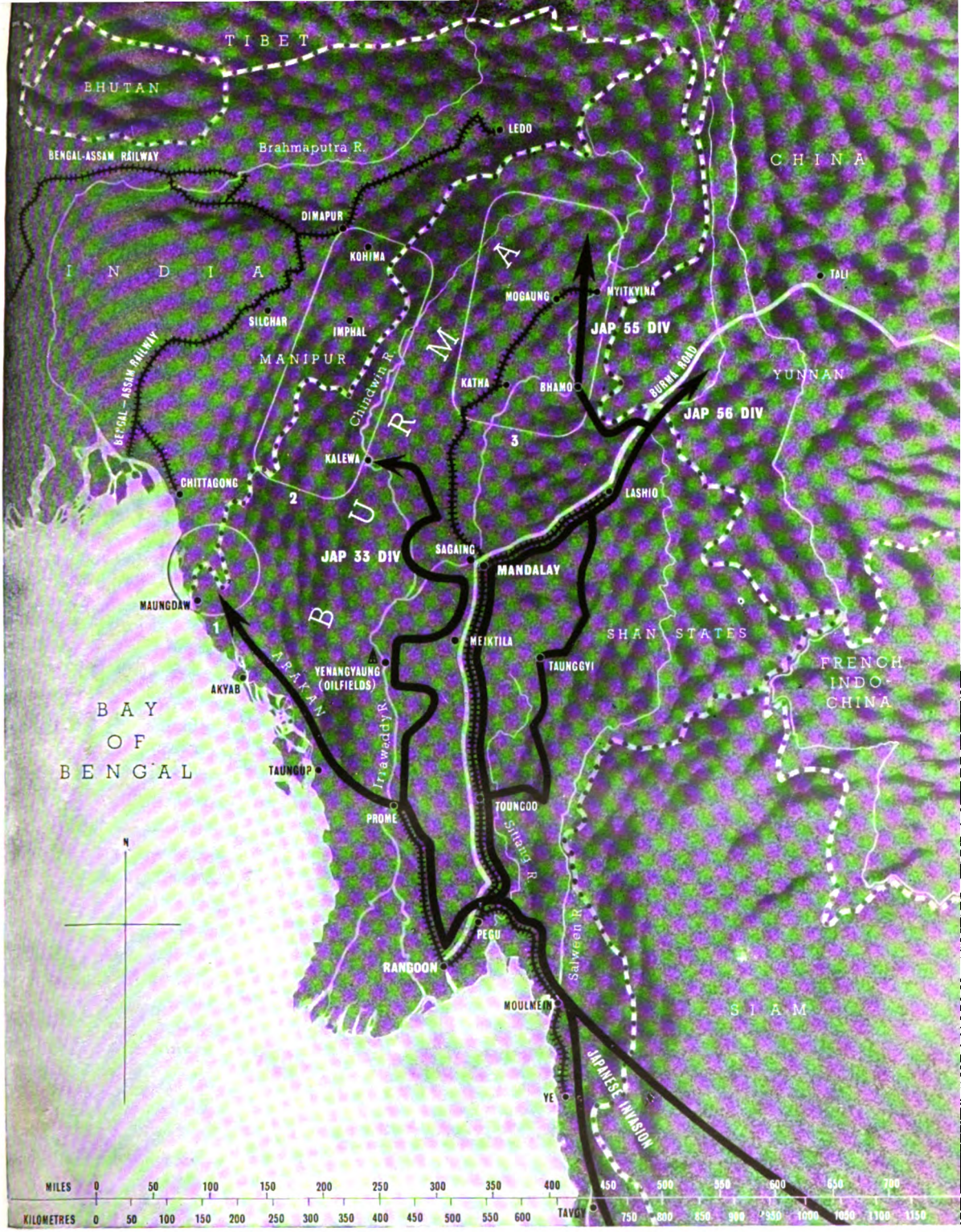
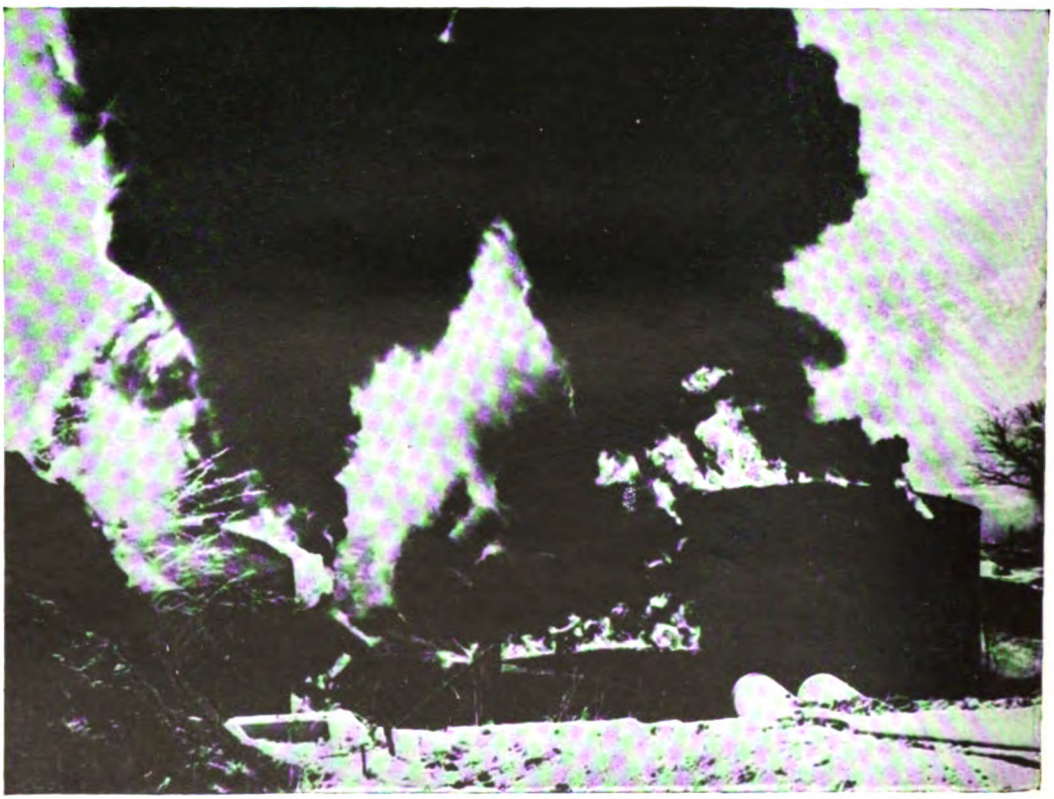


RETREAT FROM BURMA. In January 1942 the Japanese poured in across the south-eastern frontiers of Siam. Overwhelming resistance, or rushing round it like a tide, they reached the head of the Burmese river valleys under the northern arc of mountains. The force and speed of their oncoming split the hastily assembled British-Chinese army into several parts. The British retreated across the Chindwin and over the jungle ranges into India. The Chinese withdrew up the wild gorges of the Salween into the fastnesses of Yunnan. In a few weeks almost all the land of Burma passed into enemy hands; along the frontiers of India appeared the chaos [illegible]

bottle of acid-drops which he sucked, eyeing his visitors critically through steel-rimmed glasses. He economises his own speech, but every word is to the point, and Stilwell grasps the point in any conversation at an early stage. When the discussion gets too sharp he dries up altogether —" I ain't talkin'." He would march 30 miles a day, urging his men forward with adjurations and many stratagems. As Stilwell closed his 60th year he gave up chain-smoking. He had scaled a one-in-two gradient in the Mogaung Valley and paused for breath.

At the moment when the question of command was being discussed, Stilwell happened to arrive in Chungking heading an American mission of 25 officers and 60 enlisted men to train a striking force of the Chinese Army. On March 4th, he was appointed Chief of Staff to Allied Forces under the Generalissimo. A week later he reported that he had arranged for the continued supply by the British of equipment and stores to the Chinese troops. On March 14th Stilwell reached Lashio in independent command of Chinese forces in Burma. He was the first foreign officer to be given the leadership of Chinese soldiers in the field since Marco Polo. Thus hurriedly and almost casually originated Vinegar Joe's unique catalogue of commands. Later in the same month, when General Sir Harold Alexander, the new British C.-in-C. in Burma, visited Chungking, the Generalissimo asked him to accept command of all Chinese troops in Burma in the interests of unity, to which Stilwell assented. But neither these appointments nor

By these flaming cauldrons of the fired tanks of Yenangyaung, two British brigades fought a 48-hour battle to break out of the ring the enemy had thrown around them. They escaped from the trap.



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the setting-up of the short-lived " A.B.D.A." Command (American-British-Dutch-Australian) under General Wavell could stem the flow of disaster in the Far East. The Japanese sword dictated events.

By this time the situation of Rangoon was beyond repair. The enemy had infiltrated beyond the railway junction at Pegu, 47 miles above the city, cut one of the only two roads leading northward, and threatened the second. Faced with a second Singapore encirclement, Alexander gave the order for demolition and retreat. On March 7th, at two o'clock in the afternoon, a series of explosions shook the city as Government buildings, post office, power-house and industrial installations were dynamited. To the east of the port a billowing black cloud rose; the Burma Oil Company's refineries at Syriam had been blown. Columns of smoke, mingling with the flicker of the flames, filled the sky.

The last-ditchers who got out by land had to fight their way. At Taukkyan, on the Prome road twenty-one miles north of Rangoon, the Japanese erected a road-block, covering it with mortar and anti-tank fire. They held up for twenty-four hours the northward passage of General Alexander himself, who had arrived in the city three days before it fell. After successfully resisting the attack of twenty British tanks and infantry of the 1st Gloucesters, the enemy unaccountably abandoned the block. Alexander thus escaped capture by a hair's-breadth.

The British General's plan was to withdraw 17 Div., now led by Major-General David Cowan, M.C., northward by the road through Prome, until he could link it up with the 1st Burma Division. The 1st Div. concentrated south of Toungoo; Alexander hoped to establish a firm front along the line Prome-Toungoo, the more so since the Chinese 55th Division were converging on the same line from the north. To create the required unity of tactical command between the two separate British divisions a Corps Headquarters was set up at Prome under Lieutenant-General W. J. Slim, D.S.O., M.C.

Bill Slim, as the future leader of the Fourteenth Army was soon known to his troops, is a determined, undemonstrative character from the West Country. Once a junior clerk, next a school teacher, then the foreman of a testing gang in an engineering works, he served as a volunteer in the Royal Warwicks at Gallipoli, where he was wounded leading his company. He was discharged from the Army unfit for further service in 1916, but by some undivulged method he reappeared in the battle line in Mesopotamia, where he gained his M.C. Most of his life between the wars was spent with the Gurkhas. In this war he fought with distinction in Abyssinia, Syria, Iraq and Persia; it was during the first Burma campaign that his final quality was proved.

Though his years have been given to the Army, Slim has read widely and written much, for which he claims he was well paid. " No other reason for writing," he says. His sympathies are generous but just. " I am against the legal minimum wallah every time." He talks vigorously and saltily and with insight into men's motives. Though he induces goodwill and, what is more profound, trust, it is probable that Slim never unburdened his heart to any man on earth. He believes that the fighting capacity of every unit is based upon the faith of men in their leaders; that discipline begins with the officer and spreads down from him to the soldier; that genuine comradeship in arms is achieved when all ranks do more than is required of them. Slim proves his beliefs by example. The well-being of his troops is his permanent priority. Probably the central pillar in this rock-like character is a loathing of humbug. In looks the sturdy, grey-eyed man who commanded the rearguard in the retreat from Burma—and led the victorious Fourteenth Army back through Burma—resembles a prosperous farmer.

The tasks now set him were a searching test. The Japanese hung upon the heels of the retiring columns, raced ahead on their flanks, threw road-blocks across their path, and infiltrated between the units as they marched and fought northward. The enemy's occupation of the Andaman Islands on March 23rd provided cover for him to bring reinforcements into Rangoon. The Allied air forces had received a mortal blow two days earlier when the Japanese destroyed most of the remaining R.A.F. aircraft on the ground at Magwe airfield, beyond Prome. The A.V.G., who had moved to Magwe, also suffered severely before they withdrew into China. The Japanese air power mounted as the Allied declined. This factor sealed their triumph, and taught us the first lesson of the Burma campaign, namely, that air supremacy is a requisite for victory on land.

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No Respite. The retreating armies were everywhere under fire. At Pyinmana, on the Chinese retreat road, an American doctor, Seagrave, set up this emergency dressing station. But even here the wounded had little time to lie by.

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A further menace had already arisen—the pro-Japanese guerillas. Nearly a hundred miles of jungle separated the two British lines of retreat. There was practically no communication between them (air support was now a few Lysanders which Indian Air Force pilots flew impudently as "home-made bombers"). A terrorised and sometimes hostile native population inhabited this intervening area. Many Japanese infiltrating troops dressed themselves as Burmans. Some wore British uniforms. The number of Burmans who bore arms against the British, either as volunteers in the "Burma Independence Army," or as looters, has been exaggerated. At the time of the battle of Prome, the British military authorities reckoned the Burman fifth columnists there at 4,000. As the Japanese invasion submerged the land and recruits flocked to join the winning side, this total swelled to 30,000. At this peak it represents two and a half per thousand of the population of Burma, which compares respectably with the percentage of collaborationists in most European countries overrun by the Nazis. Some of the young Burmese volunteers fought bravely against the British, but the Japanese always brigaded these allies with their own troops, and never at any time permitted them to operate as independent formations.

Three years later, disillusioned by Japan's broken promises, many of them passed over to the British side as the "Patriot Burmese Forces" and rendered some service. But for the moment the effect of these roving bands of patriots, deserters, or dacoits in sniping, falling upon isolated parties of refugees and stragglers, looting, burning and killing, was to create a mood of confusion and terror helpful to the invader. Perhaps the fires were the most alarming of their crimes. As the army trudged towards the mountains, the Burma night was an umbrella of flame. Houses, temples, barns, bridges, trains, trucks, and at last the oilfields went up in a holocaust. The Land of a Million Pagodas burned.

Enter the Chinese. The troops of their crack 200th Division had taken post around Toungoo. They had been brought from the rock province of Yunnan down the Burma Road, almost the last traffic that passed along it before it was once more closed. The arrival of the Chinese troops and their ten days' stand at Toungoo permitted Slim to carry out the planned junction of his two divisions. The 1st Burma Division ("Burdiv") passed through the Chinese lines and moved across into the British reserve beyond Prome as 17 Div. fought a succession of delaying actions up to the outskirts of the town. Here the British struck back at their pursuers, inflicting severe casualties. But Japanese reinforcements pouring into Rangoon offset the aid that China had contributed. Early in April a convoy of 40 ships was reported, averaging 5,000 tons apiece. The pace of the Japanese advance increased to seven miles a day. Yet again, at Taungdwingyi, half-way between Prome and Mandalay, Slim turned and fought the Japanese to a standstill. Their air power he could not contain. Reaching 150 miles overhead on April 3rd, they launched a heavy bombing raid on Mandalay. More than 2,000 people were killed, and fire devoured the greater part of what remained. In mid-April the enemy broke through on the Irrawaddy, and although a detachment of Royal Marines on the river caused casualties among Burma Independence Army forces who sought to infiltrate by boats, the Yenangyaung oilfields were threatened. The order was given to scorch them, and it was carried out completely by Mr. W. L. Foster, an official of the oil companies. It was just in time, for 2,000 Japanese, passing round the British flank, threw road-blocks across the road to the north, encircling Burdiv with all its transport.

For two days battle raged in the oilfields, under a blazing sun and against the background of smoke rising from the demolitions as riflemen and tanks strove desperately to break through the Japanese ring. From the north the troops of General Sun-li-jen's 38th Chinese Division attacked towards the Pin Chaung which the enemy had seized across the line of retreat. There was much confused fighting in which the relieving Chinese were on occasion mistaken for the Japanese, and vice versa. Burdiv itself was a miniature United Nations. Besides the Gloucesters, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, Cameronians, Koylies and West Yorks were Sikhs, Punjabis, Rajputs, Jats, Gurkhas, Garhwalis, and Burman, Chin and Kachin troops. The Chinese also came under Slim's command. They did not succeed in prising open the jaws of the trap, but Major-General Bruce Scott managed to find a hole in it, and led his division across the front towards it. The screams of mules hit by bullets mingled with the volleys and explosions as the

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soldiers dragged them down the lanes of fire. Most of the remaining transport had to be abandoned, but thousands of Allied troops poured through the gap and rejoined the main body of the army.

While the Irrawaddy life-line was thus being saved, disaster fell upon the other flank of the Allied front. Following an engagement near Loikaw on the Upper Sittang, the 55th Chinese Division was forced back towards the Salween and the road to Lashio lay uncovered. Swiftly, the Japanese exploited the advantage. Their motorised elements swept up through the Shan States and within ten days were in Lashio, 300 miles away. The Burma Road was cut.

This decided the fate of the campaign. Nothing remained except to extricate the Allied forces from Upper Burma to their respective bases. The Chinese proposed to withdraw through Bhamo, but so rapid was the Japanese drive northward along their flank that many of these Chinese soldiers eventually found their way to India by way of the Hukawng Valley. The British planned to hold the line of the Chindwin River and the densely wooded Chin Hills. They fought a brilliant rearguard action at Kyaukse south of Mandalay to cover the passage of their armour across the Irrawaddy by the Ava Bridge. The Japanese spearheads were held in check, and then at dawn on April 30th the British sappers blew two spans of the bridge, one of the greatest in Asia.

The Japanese pressed straight across the Chindwin, which lies to the west of the Irrawaddy. They meant to intercept the crossing of this river by the retreating troops. For once they were outmarched, though they did all in their power to bar the path to the frontier. It had become a nightmare, these thousand miles of battle and retreat in which almost everything that had been counted on never materialised. "If they had brought me one piece of good news," said General Slim, "I should have burst out crying. But nobody ever did." Soldiers stumbled onward weakened by wounds and privation, until they dropped in the dust—or a comrade held them up. Indians threw away their dilapidated boots and plodded on with raw feet. Uniforms were rags, and equipment had long since been shed; one thing all held on to—their weapons. Some British battalions were reduced to 100 men. This army in retreat also carried with them along their trackless route 2,000 sick and wounded, whom they refused to abandon to the mercies of the enemy.

Slim made a bid to save his vehicles and armour, too. He sent ahead a small column composed of each type of truck, tank and heavy anti-aircraft gun to try out the path, and to widen it sufficiently for the rest. He brought his tanks and transport to the banks of the Chindwin—only to find there was no shipping that could carry it across.

Last scene in this grim sequence was one more battle. It happened at the ferry near Kalewa where the Japanese, creeping up the riverside, sought to cut off the rearguard and destroy it at a stroke. But the British fought them off again and crossed the river. They burned their remaining tanks and stores on the Burma bank, burying the tank guns, and marched into India, an army still. It was across the Chindwin, and at this same place, that two and a half years later the troops of the Fourteenth Army would construct the longest Bailey bridge in the world, and over it pass triumphantly on their return journey down the road to Mandalay.

The end of the retreat was in sight. The British columns disappeared into the mountains of Manipur as the monsoon rains broke. As the last echelons passed over the Tamu road it was washed out behind them. On May 20th, Alexander's Army of Burma ceased to exist as a command, and his troops were incorporated into the IVth Corps of the India Command based on Imphal. Alexander himself left for England to take over new duties; Slim was put in command of the XVth Corps in India.

Stilwell also tramped out of Burma by the soldiers' road, though he emerged beyond Homalin, higher up the river. He claimed: "We took a hell of a beating." Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, Governor of Burma, went north to Myitkyina and was ordered to leave by Mr. Churchill on May 4th. He flew to India in one of the last planes from Burma.

The Japanese entered Myitkyina three days later. They pushed patrols as far up as Fort Hertz. The Chinese drew back beyond the Salween, except for those units which continued northward through the Hukawng Valley into India. To the west the invaders struck away from the Irrawaddy over the hills to Taungup and on through the mangrove swamps to Ramree Island and Akyab. All the land of Burma passed to Japan.

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Way Out. General Joe Stilwell marched out of Burma armed with a stick. He led a handful of men on foot through 140 miles of tortuous jungle and brought them to India. Later, at the head of an army, he was to ride back into Burma on a road of his own making.

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4. LEAN DAYS

GENERAL SLIM'S regiments came out of Burma as skin and bones, in rags, though under arms, and took post along the frontier for the monsoon.

In a sense this curtain of rain saved India, for the Japanese were no better prepared than the British to fight through five months' downpour. If there had been no force to bar their way they might have pushed on across the frontier, but to mount a fresh offensive along jungle tracks wheel-deep in mud and against troops that still fought was too much for them. And the defence continued to fight. The Frontier Force Rifles operated along the line of the hills, and patrols reached out far southward. Around their base in Imphal plain IVth Corps day after day practised large-scale exercises designed to draw advantage from the lessons of the campaign.

The British forces' experiences had been painfully instructive. Having very few planes, the Army had learned by default to appreciate the value of land-air co-operation. That its weapons were inadequate and its equipment unsuited to war in the jungle had been demonstrated beyond doubt. Troops in constant touch with the enemy developed rapidly in battle skill, but the general standard of training was uneven. As for junior leadership, more than ever important in this war in the shadows, officers fresh from cadet formations had been called upon to undertake responsibilities far beyond their powers. The campaign had been fought on a shoe-string, and the Army paid for it. They inflicted very heavy losses on the enemy, but of all the British and Indian combat troops engaged since the outset only 12,000 marched into India. Of these barely a sixth were anything but sick.

Everyone had something to learn, the civilians no less than the soldiers. The irruption of an invader into a land not yet versed in self-government, though lately granted a substantial measure of it, overwhelmed the civil administration. Martial law was the remedy that some critics proposed after the event, and also a number of army officers at the time. The Governor refused. His view was (and is) that such order as could be created owed much to the co-operation of the representative Burmese ministers. Military dictatorship might have forfeited this loyalty.

There is a tale which must be told elsewhere of the suffering of the 400,000 Indian and Burmese refugees who fled before the fire and sword of the enemy. Probably 10,000 died on the road to India, most of them in the dreaded Hukawng Valley beyond Myitkyina. Invasion is a terrible force; communications collapse under the load of evacuation, information dries up, rumour runs wild, order dissolves. In Burma, a land of jungle and mountain, with few roads and fewer railways, it was impossible to improvise an organisation which could handle an exodus.

The large majority of officials and European residents did their duty, and many paid for it with their lives. Some, like Foster who destroyed the oil-wells at Yenangyaung, and the last-ditchers in Rangoon, rendered great military service. Others, such as Father James Stuart at Sumprabum in the northern mountains, saved lives by their courage and quick thinking. Stuart, an Irish Catholic missionary among the Kachins, stayed behind during the retreat to look after the refugee old folk and children who had fallen by the roadside. He resolved to go and face the Japanese. He set off down the trail, and beyond Sumprabum he met an officer sitting on a horse. At first Father Stuart mistook him for a Chinese. He went up to him and said "Chinese?" The officer spat out of the corner of his mouth and barked "No! Japanese!" Then he looked full in the face of the missionary and said harshly "English?" Father Stuart, without batting an eyelid, spat out of the corner of his mouth and snapped "No! Irish!" The Japanese broke into a grin, and asked to be led to the village. He inspected the refugees and promised not to molest them, and he kept his word.

Many an example of devotion and self-sacrifice shone through this night of tragedy in Burma. The testimony of an American officer, Lieutenant-Colonel John L. Christian, gives perhaps the truest general picture of what had happened. He was formerly a missionary and had lived long in the country. (He was later killed at the recapture of Rangoon.) "No country," said this observer, "is ever ready for sudden invasion such as the Japanese launched with equal success in all the countries of South-East Asia and the adjacent islands. The key to the British defeat

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in Burma is military, not political as has been assumed. The United Nations were either unable or unwilling to supply the military force necessary to stop the Japanese. All other explanations are secondary."

To create that force was now the task of the Allied leaders. Stilwell resumed in India the training of those Chinese divisions which he had begun in Yunnan before the speed of the Japanese invasion called them into Burma. The Generalissimo agreed to furnish him with further reinforcements and soon these arrived by air from China. In April an American pilot named Lieutenant-Colonel William D. Old had flown a military plane from India across the Himalayas to China, blazing the pioneer trail over "The Hump." During the summer 24 Douglas C.47 transport aircraft, commanded by Colonel Tate, of the United States Army Air Force, brought 13,000 Chinese troops to Stilwell straight over the Hump by regular air service. This transportation was carried on without loss throughout the monsoon, with no fighter protection, and in an area where the Japanese had air mastery.

Tate's enterprise was only part of a two-way traffic that was developing into a major strategic Anglo-American commitment. Even before the fall of Burma, half a dozen aged transport aircraft had been flying on routine passage from India to Burma to reinforce supplies along the Burma Road. When the Road was lost and all land communication with China cut, it did not mean a final break in the life-line. An air ferry over the Himalayas could never be a joy-ride with its ceiling of 22,000 feet and its atmospheric turbulences strong enough to drop the most powerfully engined aircraft thousands of feet like a stone, but the American pilots set out to prove that the highest barrier on earth could be crossed 24 hours a day all the year round. Almost as soon as road tonnage ceased to flow, Hump tonnage began.

Beginning as a skeleton service, the air ferry grew into one of the greatest war supply achievements of all time. A fleet of 300 planes plied the sky to China, and to service them a chain of airfields, protected by R.A.F. fighter aircraft, stretched along the Upper Brahmaputra Valley, requiring an ever-multiplying ground maintenance force. On December 1st, 1942, this expanding organisation became the India-China Wing of the U.S.A.A.F. Air Transport Command. An aerial shuttle-run was established from Patterson Field, Ohio, to Assam, delivering airplane parts to the end of the longest supply line in the world in five days. General Arnold, Chief of the U.S.A.A.F., who flew to Chungking to discuss the project with the Generalissimo, must be regarded as the master architect of this golden bridge to China.

The objective of Stilwell's Chinese troops had ever been to keep open (or later, to reopen) the land route to China. It was to be done by recovering northern Burma and building a highway from Ledo in the Brahmaputra Valley across the mountains to link with the Burma Road at some point beyond Myitkyina. This was to be carried out in conjunction with a new Chinese army then being formed in Yunnan.

Though Stilwell had departed for India the American training of these Chinese troops in Yunnan continued. His new battle-school pupils in India were named Force X, those in Yunnan were known as Force Y. The only difference between the two was that the American officers in Yunnan were purely advisers both during training and operations, whereas in India and, later, on the front, Stilwell exercised direct command over his Chinese formations. He planned to launch his campaign on January 15th, 1943, expecting Force Y to be ready to advance in strength from the east by March 1st. But Yunnan did not come up to scratch in time; the Ledo Road, originally a British project, got off to a slow start; the Japanese concentrations across Stilwell's path remained strong, for they had gradually built up during the year to about 80,000 troops in Burma, about half being poised against Yunnan. Stilwell reluctantly rewrote the date of his engagement.

For Wavell, as Commander-in-Chief, there were other limitations. Besides the strength of the enemy and the weakness of the British-Indian forces, the political situation was unfavourable to any considerable commitment on the frontier. The failure of the Cripps Mission to bring the Congress Party wholeheartedly into the struggle on the Allied side imposed on the Commander-in-Chief the duty of distributing his strength not only in defence of the 700-mile Burma-India frontier, but at strategic centres along India's 4,000-mile coastline. These were the lean days. So while the sappers and pioneers, with an army of native labour recruited largely from the tea plantations, built military roads in Manipur (the

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THE THREE FRONTS stood along the fortress wall of mountains which divides India from the Burma plain. The Southern Front—that coastal strip of swamp and jungle hills called Arakan—was the scene of the earliest battles as the enemy made repeated efforts to break through to Calcutta. When these failed he switched his main attack to the Central Front, climbing to the cockpit of Imphal from which he hoped to

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pour his armies into Assam. Meanwhile the Chindits and Stilwell struck back on the Northern Front, the former raiding Japanese communications, the latter pushing his Ledo Road south past Myitkyina to link at last with the severed Burma Road. On either side of the mountain arc, feeding the desolate fronts, lay a web of rivers, roads and railways where the opposing armies fought their battle of supply.

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The Hard Way. Back on the frontiers of India began the lean days of digging in and preparing for the battles to come. Through mud, river, and dripping forest, the roads were built and the supplies brought up.

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main front), erected hospitals and bases, and drained the Assam flood lands for airfields, the role of the combat troops was confined to two separate and small-scale offensive operations.

The first of these was an attempt to retake the Mayu Peninsula and the island of Akyab on the Bay of Bengal. It set out to the accompaniment of widespread publicity that the purpose was nothing less than the invasion of Burma, and it ended as an equally exaggerated failure. The second undertaking was the long-range march of Brigadier Orde C. Wingate, D.S.O., across the mountain barrier 200 miles deep into Japanese-held Burma. Launched and completed in secrecy, this miniature campaign was subsequently blazoned in the newspaper headlines and sent the name of its leader ringing round the world. Neither occasion had any immediate consequences. The aim of the Akyab thrust had been restricted to the capture of the port and airfield there, while the Wingate intruder march was not followed up by larger forces. Each of these operations was an experiment, and, if one shone forth brightly by comparison with the other, the army learned, again not without grief, from both.

5. REPULSE IN ARAKAN

THIS FIRST Arakan campaign was conducted upon so narrow a terrain that its topography may be dealt with in a few words. Arakan is a land of steep little hills covered with jungle, of paddy-fields, scrub and swamp. In such country advancing troops can walk over an enemy who is lying doggo and never be aware of him until they get a grenade or a burst of machine-gun fire in their backs. Akyab itself is a port of 45,000 people, standing on an island about 90 miles south of the India-Burma border. It served the Japanese in Arakan, as Chittagong up the coast served the British-Indian forces, as a reception point for troops and supplies.

North of Akyab the Mayu Peninsula sharpens to a tip called Foul Point. The Mayu Peninsula is split by the steep 1,500-foot spine of the Mayu Range, flanked by low-lying foothills, so that on neither side are the strips of flat land more than a few hundred yards wide. Since these flats are themselves intersected by innumerable tidal creeks, the difficulties of deploying even a brigade for attack will be realised. For a tank assault the banks need to be ramped, for the dried mud crumbles at the edges. It had been originally planned to take Akyab by seaborne assault, with the landward forces making no more than a diversionary advance along the coast. Shortage of amphibious assault craft prevented this full design. Wavell reduced it to a land thrust to Foul Point, to be followed by a ferrying of the troops across the Mayu estuary to Akyab Island.

The success of the plan depended upon prompt execution. Akyab was still lightly garrisoned, and though another Japanese division was on the way the nature of the country made its progress slow. But bad weather delayed Wavell, too, and it was not until mid-December that the British advance began. The available troops were 14th Indian Division (Major-General W. L. Lloyd, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.), and consisted of the 47th, 55th, 88th and 123rd Indian Brigades, to which were added later the 4th, 23rd, 36th and 71st Indian Brigades and the 6th British. They moved forward down either side of the Mayu Range and also along the eastern bank of the Mayu River. By the end of December the patrols were almost in Donbaik, ten miles above Foul Point on one side of the estuary, and on the outskirts of Rathedaung on the other. Again the difficulty of bringing forward supplies 150 miles from railhead, and over a road which bridged as many creeks and gullies, held up movement. Nor could "Wavell's Navy," woefully short of power-craft and sampans, exploit the local waterways. When the advance was resumed on January 6th, 1943, the Japanese were reinforced and dug in. The drive on Rathedaung was repulsed despite the skilful flanking action of the 1st/15th Punjabis, and the frontal assault by the 10th Lancashire Fusiliers and the Rajputana Rifles.

The decisive check was in front of Donbaik. Against a defence-in-depth the British-Indian brigades launched two successive full-scale frontal attacks, all in vain. A third attack was supported by tanks, but these were quickly ditched and knocked out at close range by anti-tank fire. On February 18th, the headlong charge of the 2nd/1st Punjabis over open ground pene-

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trated the Japanese positions, and a struggle at close range followed among the bunkers. But the impetus of the attack could not be sustained. Fewer than half of the assaulting troops reached their own lines.

It was clear that the enemy had gained enough time to enable him to bring up his reinforcements. Field-Marshal Wavell conferred with Lieutenant-General N. M. S. Irwin, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., who, as Commander of the Eastern Army of India Command, was responsible for all operations on the Burma Front, and directed him to bring forward the 6th Brigade for a final attack on Donbaik. This brigade, which was borrowed from the 2nd British Division, had been trained in combined operations and held at Chittagong in readiness for the seaborne attack on Akyab. It was supported by the 71st Brigade of the 26th Indian Division. On March 18th the assault was launched.

It followed the same luckless pattern. The initial onrush pierced the Japanese defences, only to be broken up among the many underground strong-points which remained in action. The British regiments, which included the Royal Welch Fusiliers, Royal Scots, Royal Berkshire, Durham Light Infantry and an additional battalion of the Lincolns, fought with superb dash and determination. "I remember," writes a military observer, "how on the morning of March 18th men of the Royal Welch Fusiliers actually got on top of the two 'humps' which were the strong-points of the position. If any troops on earth could have stayed there and captured it they would have done so, for their attacking spirit that day was immense. But they were machine-gunned and mortared off the coverless ground."

Meantime, an ominous movement was developing. A mixed force of about three Japanese battalions, led by a dynamic Colonel named Tanahashi, began a counter-offensive, directed in the first instance against the British flank guard in the Kaladan Valley, away to the east. Tanahashi fell upon these troops and scattered them, some withdrawing northward and others passing by devious routes over the hills to the west. This laid bare the British flank, and Tanahashi at once exploited it by striking at their communications outside Rathedaung. He aimed to trap the 55th Brigade there, and came near to succeeding. But the 2nd/1st Punjabis, withstanding six attacks on a key hill, broke out with a bayonet charge which swept the enemy in rout across the paddy-fields, where the artillery destroyed them. Lieutenant-Colonel A. W. Lowther gained the D.S.O. here for his coolness and skill. At the height of an engagement he used to sit in a deck-chair at a vantage point, directing operations while drinking tea.

The British drew back up the Mayu River, eluding the trap at Rathedaung. But Tanahashi was not done; he crossed the Mayu River by night, and next day straddled the Mayu Range. He threatened to cut off the brigades operating on either side of it. On the night of April 5th, Japanese raiding patrols overran the headquarters of 6th Brigade, then retiring along the coast from Donbaik. The enemy captured Brigadier Cavendish and killed several of his staff. Some of his troops, however, slipped through this second Japanese trap some time before it closed.

On the eastern side of the Range, the 47th Brigade eluded Tanahashi's claws by splitting up its battalions into small groups. Brigadier Wimberley and his party were ten days in the hills, for the greater part without food, and marching twelve hours a day on half a cup of tea. Most of the brigade got through, but Fusilier Dunn of the Inniskillings was one who did not. His comrades reported that when he was becoming so weak as to be a burden to them he walked off the track into the jungle to die, saying with a smile "I can take it." The Japanese gave vent to their anger at missing most of their prey by torturing those whom they caught.

The monsoon was looming when the troops of 14 Div. were relieved by the 26th Indian Division (Major-General C. E. N. Lomax, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.). Tanahashi delivered one last blow when he seized the dominating Point 551 on the Mayu Range. To avoid encirclement there the remaining British withdrew northward, and made their way also across the Range to the west. On May 12th it was decided to evacuate Maungdaw, which had been built up into an advanced base. The army was back where it had started six months before.

The event cost it 2,500 battle casualties. Malaria cost infinitely more, and there is no doubt that the troops who were engaged in the first Arakan campaign came out severely shaken. Both British and Indian morale suffered a reverse, and in some quarters these misfortunes were used to question the fighting value of the Indian Army. The tactics pursued appear, from

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this distance of time and experience, to have been surprising. As to individual worth, many an Indian soldier had displayed courage of the highest order. Some sought certain death by approaching the Japanese foxholes and flinging their bombs into them at point-blank range. They were blown up with the enemy. For the organisational failure Field-Marshal Wavell made reply: " I set a small part of the army a task beyond their training and capacity; the main responsibility for the failure is mine, but when the effort on the other side becomes known it will certainly not be found wholly to our disadvantage."

In his appreciation of the future Wavell proved correct. Few of the commanders in the field shared the pessimism which spread rearward and pictured the Japanese as invincible jungle fighters. On the contrary, their close experience of the enemy convinced them that, once the element of surprise had disappeared from his tactics (and this happened after the initial attack), their main content was exhausted. Two other factors contributed to the enemy's strength: (i) his superior mobility, based on the unique marching power of his infantry, and (ii) his fanatical bravery in battle. For the moment the Allies lacked the answer to the first, though certain commanders, among whom was Slim, saw that it lay in air supply. As to the second, they set about the hard task of building up the confidence of their troops in their weapons, tactics and leaders. The sum of these items is disciplined faith, which is the dynamo of armies.

The lessons of the air were once again significant. Lack of air superiority and transport planes prevented the British-Indian forces from supplying from the sky troops who were threatened by encirclement on the ground. The Japanese Zeros outmatched the Hurricanes.

The fall of Burma had left the R.A.F. with practically no airfields from which it could work in co-operation with the Army. But throughout the 1942 monsoon, as the Arakan coastal road was developed, the sappers built air-strips alongside it, and early in December 224 Group Air Command, of Bengal, with eight Hurricane and two Blenheim squadrons, moved from Calcutta to Chittagong. As the strips dried out, some of the Hurricane squadrons went forward. Coastal protection was entrusted to light naval forces of the Royal Indian Navy.

During the advance down the Mayu Peninsula, the R.A.F. gave close support to the troops, holding off all enemy interference. But as siege operations developed the Japanese Air Force made a determined bid for mastery. They bombed the R.A.F.'s forward strips, seeking to push its fighter planes back and deprive the Army of its air cover while they launched their own land counter-offensive. If this plan had succeeded, the campaign would have ended in disaster. The Japanese next switched over to bombing airfields, communication centres and headquarters at Chittagong, Dohazari, Feni and Comilla. For a time this mixture of attacks gave serious trouble. The enemy bombers would come in at 18,000 feet, and with its limited resources the R.A.F. did well to destroy 100 of them.

It was always possible for the enemy to attack any strip along the narrow Mayu coastal plain. But the R.A.F. put up 2,000 sorties during the campaign, and at the height of it four fighter squadrons (135, 136, 261 and 607) were often flying 150 sorties a day. They gripped the Japanese air power and repelled its offensive, offsetting the reverses on the ground.

Perhaps the most interesting comment came from Tanahashi, the Japanese commander. " There must be no fear of aircraft," he ordered his troops. " As long as you are not discovered, you must seek to remain so. If once our position is revealed, the enemy planes must be shot down. It is not permissible to suppose that our soldiers are no match for aircraft." In this, Tanahashi recognised the cloud no bigger than a man's hand. The air power of the Allies was soon to revolutionise the jungle war.

For as the Army of the Jungle grew up, so the Air Forces, British, American and Indian, spread their wings above them. The fighter squadrons increased in strength and were re-equipped with Hurricanes and Kittyhawks; the bomber squadrons received Liberators, Mitchells, Wellingtons, Blenheims and Vultee Vengeances. There were even a few Spitfires for reconnaissance. The Americans expanded their air transport ferry service until aircraft were taking off for the Hump every three minutes.

In building up the Allied air power everything had to start from scratch, but steadily the complex system of maintaining a first-class air force arose—observer warning posts, signals, radiolocation, fuelling, spares, repairs, adjustments. A network of radar stations covered all approaches to Bengal and Assam.

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The construction of air-strips in such wild country must always be a difficult task. It involved first of all draining the paddy-fields, which were the obvious sites because there was no jungle to clear. These fields are divided into lots, each about 40 yards square and separated by a bund, or earthen ridge, rather more than a foot high. In the dry season, when rainfall may be reduced to a quarter of an inch per month, dust became the enemy. As many as 200 tons of oil would be required to spread over a single airfield. In the monsoon the same strips were transformed into a sea of mud. To build a heavy bomber all-weather airfield, about 300,000 tons of concrete were required. If the airfields were of brick, then many millions of bricks were needed, kilns had to be erected and thousands of tons of coal-dust transported there by road, rail or river to burn the bricks. If steel planking was laid as surfacing, 600 sorties of transport aircraft were required to ship it in. When you had completed your airfield Nature would counter-attack again with blazing sun which melted the bitumen and subsoil that sank beneath the paving. The sappers took all this in their stride.

The airmen were ready for business before the soldiers, and as soon as they were, the R.A.F. and the U.S.A.A.F. passed to the offensive. Indeed, it was an essential preliminary to any major land operation that air superiority should be established in the Burma sky. Four main duties were laid upon the air: (i) to give close support to the troops, not only by attacking the immediate rear of the enemy and preventing his concentration, but by direct attack with bombs and cannon fire against his forward positions; (ii) to supply the army with food, ammunition, weapons, equipment, medical stores, petrol, and even water; (iii) to deny supply to the enemy by disrupting his communications and destroying his transport and depots; (iv) to transport reinforcing troops and battle casualties. There was also the charge of defending the Indian cities, though after the air victories of the Hurricanes above Ceylon at Easter 1942 this task was not exacting.

In general, the R.A.F. bombers concentrated on targets within 250 miles, while the longer-range U.S.A.A.F. planes attacked farther afield. Most of the night bombing in this early period was done by the R.A.F. medium and light planes. Later, the giant B.24s reached out as far as the Gulf of Siam and lit up the darkness with bombs on Bangkok. The enemy was gradually driven back by Allied bombers and long-range fighters until he was operating his heavy bombers from Siam. The Allies had begun to shape the Burma War their own way.

6. WINGATE'S FIRST MISSION

THE LATE Major-General Orde Charles Wingate, D.S.O., was an unusual man. He commanded the confidence of unusual men, too. Wavell believed in him, and twice already had given him his head—in Palestine before the war, where he had organised a Jewish volunteer militia to fight Arab terrorism, and in Abyssinia in 1940–41, when he had proved his guerilla genius as a leader of the patriots against the Italians. Later, Churchill would find himself in harmony with his daring and powerful mind. Mountbatten, too, in coming days would take this strange man to his heart, encourage him and back him to the limit, even when he was being temperamental.

Wingate was one who did not joyfully suffer opposition. He drew down the lightning on his own head, alas, in the final, tragic sense, for he was killed in his hour of triumph, flying with characteristic defiance through an electric storm. When he fell his friend and Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-General Slim, Commander of Fourteenth Army, wrote a tribute to him in which he analysed his quality as leader. "Wingate had clear vision," wrote Slim. "He could also impart his belief to others. Above all, he could adapt to his own purpose the ideas, practices and techniques of others once he was satisfied of their soundness. To see Wingate urging action on some hesitant commander was to realise how a medieval baron felt when Peter the Hermit got after him to go crusading. Lots of barons found Peter the Hermit an uncomfortable fellow, but they went crusading all the same." Wingate himself considered that "the chief difference between a good and bad commander is an accurate imagination."

Early in 1942, during the retreat from Burma,

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"We should land up about here." Orde Wingate created the Chindits; he planned their long-range penetrations behind the enemy lines and gave guerilla tactics a new and spectacular twist.

Wavell had applied for his services to organise guerilla levies. By the time he arrived the campaign was almost over. Wingate drew from it the necessary deductions, and set before Wavell a plan to carry Japanese envelopment tactics a stage beyond their own practice. He proposed a specially trained and organised brigade, which should penetrate deep into enemy territory and operate there by means of air supply and wireless without depending on the normal military lines of communication. "The vulnerable artery is the Line of Communication winding through the jungle," said Wingate. "Have no L. of C. on the jungle floor. Bring in the goods like Father Christmas, down the chimney."

Wavell approved. A formation was created, to be known as the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade, comprising the 13th Battalion of the King's Liverpool Regiment, 3rd/2nd Gurkha Rifles, 2nd Battalion of the Burma Rifles, and the 142nd Commando Company. These units were in no sense hand-picked: they were those who were available. They were placed under Wingate's command, and in July 1942 were moved to the Central Provinces to begin an intensive course of jungle training, based on Wingate's own experience and theories.

Wavell had schemed that Wingate's Brigade should cut enemy communications south of Myitkyina as Stilwell advanced into North

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Burma. But early in February 1943 it became plain that there would be no Chinese offensive from Yunnan. As the prospect of a joint campaign vanished, Wavell had to consider whether or not he should employ the brigade at all. They had concentrated at Imphal in seven self-contained columns, marching down from railhead at Dimapur 120 miles away. On the evening of February 6th, Wavell held a long conference with Wingate and decided to let him go on with his expedition alone. Next morning he inspected the force and saw them march off towards Tamu, bound for Burma. Hundreds of pack-mules, oxen and even elephants accompanied them. The R.A.F., however, were to provide the main supply system of the expedition, air liaison officers were attached to each column, and on their march towards the frontier Wingate's

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brigade practised close co-operation with the planes.

Their directive was to enter the country through the front held by the IVth Corps, to cut the main railway line between Mandalay and Myitkyina, harass the enemy in the Shwebo area, and finally, if Wingate considered the conditions favourable, to cross the Irrawaddy and cut the railway between Mandalay and Lashio. It was vital to conceal these intentions from the enemy and to get beyond the Chindwin River to the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway, 150 miles to the east, without being detected.

As deception, a couple of Gurkha columns crossed the Chindwin three days ahead of the main body and 50 miles to the south. Already, the 23rd Indian Division were simulating an attack on Kalewa, and the Gurkha decoy force created the additional demonstration required for the rest of the brigade to pass over the Chindwin undisturbed. These main forces advanced rapidly towards the railway, which they reached after a fortnight's march through deep jungle—and not without fighting. The R.A.F. air-drop supply system came through this first important test with almost 100 per cent. success.

It is not the purpose of this narrative to trace the paths of the various columns nor to follow the adventures of their commanders, Fergusson, Calvert, and company, names that have rung through the jungle war for years. These stories deserve their separate volumes, and they will surely rank among the most stirring in the English language. One of Wingate's columns was ambushed and a second scattered before he got astride the railway. Then for several hours the gorges echoed with the thunder of explosion and the crash of rock and metal as one bridge after another was blown up. This demolition fury was crowned when the raiders blasted the side of Bonchaung Gorge, bringing thousands of tons of cliffside down on to the track. Over a length of 30 miles they cut the railway in more than 75 places.

Wingate had completed the first phase of his mission with speed and precision. He resolved to tackle the second objective, the Mandalay-Lashio railway. It involved the crossing of the Irrawaddy, and for this hazardous operation he dispersed his columns over a wide field. They crossed the river safely, though the Japanese were now buzzing like an angry wasps' nest. They believed Wingate had a whole division in their rear. They were apprehensive of the Chinese massing in Yunnan, for they had already them-

The Raiders. Deliberately burning their boats, the Chindits struck deep into enemy territory. Piling their mules with stores, they forded the deep streams in their path. Their weapons: small-arms and dynamite. Their job: to blow a bridge, fire a dump, destroy communications.

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The Signal Fire. "Have no L. of C. on the jungle floor," said Wingate. "Bring in the goods, like Father Christmas, down the chimney."

The smoke rising from the hillside, *right*, is a Chindit sign to supplying aircraft. *Above*, the air crew, locating the target, heave the stuff down into the jungle.

selves mounted a sizeable offensive against the Kachin guerillas around Sumprabum, 80 miles beyond Myitkyina. These native levies were reinforced by a battalion of the Burma Regiment, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Gamble and based on Fort Hertz, a strong-point which the Allies never gave up in the far north of Burma. Supplied entirely by air-drop, the garrison of Fort Hertz and its patrols carried on unrelenting partisan warfare.

But difficulties began to accumulate for Wingate. Not only did the enemy assemble a force several times outnumbering his own, but the R.A.F. supply dropping, which had so far worked without a hitch, became less certain in the broad open tracts beyond the Irrawaddy, for having made their signals, units had been forced to move before the aircraft could reach them with supplies. The heat was intense, there was a shortage of water, and the sickness rate was rising. Many of the mules had been killed and a number of them eaten, and the tired troops now bore their pack-animals' burdens. Wingate knew that the endurance of his force was running out.

Reluctantly, he abandoned his design against the Mandalay-Lashio railway, and broke his force up into dispersal groups with orders to make their several ways back to India. This manœuvre had been an integral part of their training, and it worked in practice. Most of the groups reached the Chindwin near Sittaung, where they came under the shield of 23rd Indian Division. Others came out of Burma farther north; one daringly marched eastward, crossed the Salween and reached China. The Chinese people fêted them, and the Americans flew them home to India. By June 1943 the Wingate expedition was over.

It had been an heroic enterprise. All officers and men who took part in it marched not less than 750 miles, and most of them did 1,000 miles. They accomplished this feat in ten to twelve weeks. Their path lay not along roads or even tracks, but through the jungle and over a mass of formless hills. The effort of marching a mile across such country would equal three or four miles on a road. Every man carried on his back about 70 lb. of pack, or roughly half his own weight. Oddly enough (though as Wingate had predicted) the prolonged strain prevented the appearance of disease at the time, but it left the body weakened at the end of the campaign. It must be remembered that the men who performed these prodigies were mostly factory hands, clerks, and town-bred labourers. About one-third of them did not return. The Burmese troops who accompanied the expedition proved to be invaluable both as guides and jungle fighters.

Was it a success? Wingate claimed "a weapon has been found which may well prove a counter to the obstinate but unimaginative courage of the Japanese soldier and which will give scope to the military qualities which the British soldier still shares with his ancestors. These qualities, hitherto unsuspected by the world, are firstly intelligence in action, that is, originality in individual fighting, and secondly, on the moral side, self-reliance and the power to give of his best when the audience is smallest."

As for the Japanese, Wingate's raiding operation confirmed the experience of commanders who had met this enemy in pitched battle. Said Wingate, "His mind is slow but methodical. He is a reasoned, if humourless, student of war in all its phases. He has carefully thought out the answer to all ordinary problems. He hates a leap in the dark to such an extent that he will do anything rather than make it."

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The Men. They returned out of the jungle by air and on foot ; lean, bearded, bright-eyed with fever some, others wounded, all in rags. They returned with tales of destruction and with valuable experience of the enemy. They returned to a place where, for the first time in months, they could sleep at peace among friends.

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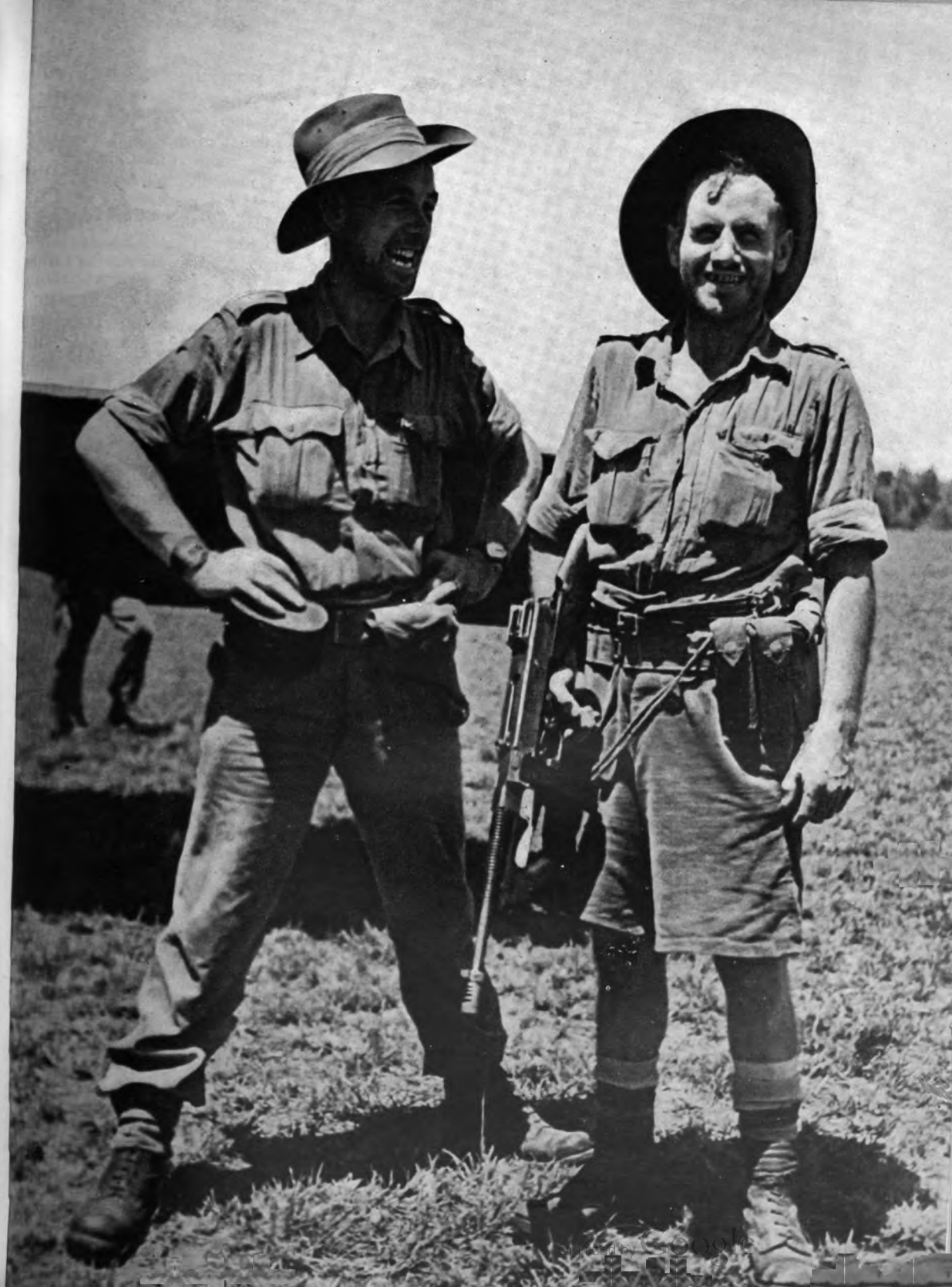

The orthodoxy of the Japanese made it possible for Wingate's commanders to predict with accuracy the enemy's reaction to any move on their part, by no means a universal condition in warfare. When the Japanese were faced with any situation they could not comprehend, their instinct was to withdraw. On the other hand, when they believed they knew the strength and intention of the forces opposing them, the Japanese fought with the utmost courage and determination. They went to the limit to discover these facts. Since they were not usually ascertainable under a good many hours, the British columns were able to strike camp and vanish into the jungle before the Japanese blow could be directed against them.

General Wingate summed up the achievements of the expedition in these words: "A considerable force entered Japanese-occupied Burma through a front requiring to be held by an army corps, penetrated to a depth of 200 miles, smashed up a vital line of communication, arrested a Japanese threat to the north already developing, occupied many times its own number of Japanese troops, diverted the enemy's attention and confused his plans. Above all, while doing so they demonstrated a new method of warfare suited to the genius of the United Nations and correspondingly difficult for the Axis to adopt."

Against this estimate some critics held that the Wingate expedition achieved very little at high cost. Perhaps the soundest way to assess its profit and loss is by the test indicated in the last sentence of Wingate's summing-up. Did his experiment in 1943 make possible his achievement in 1944? For the Chindit operations in 1944, with their bearing upon the general campaign, were of unquestionable value, though of moral as much as physical quality. Judged by this standard, Wingate's pioneer venture was justified.

The Only Spoon—valued more highly than gold.

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II. BUILD UP

7. THE BIRTH OF S.E.A.C.

IN 1943 the Army had so far recovered its resilience that promptly after the setback in Arakan the divisional commanders began to rebuild the combat power of their units. The basis of this was to apply the lessons of the previous years. The hard preparation opened with the struggle for mastery in patrolling. Patrol training paid dividends. The length of the patrol period and the number of men employed were gradually raised. Then, on the basis of this man-to-man superiority over the enemy, a series of minor offensives was launched against his advanced detachments. These operations were carefully worked out and well led, and they were 90 per cent. successful. The confidence of the Army rose steadily. Beyond this local recovery two other factors made for reinvigoration. The first was the setting-up of a new Allied Command in South-East Asia; the second was its brisk air and promise of action.

The man chosen for the post of Supreme Allied Commander was Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, G.C.V.O., K.C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C. At the age of forty-three he had already served thirty years in the Royal Navy, including two years as Chief of Combined Operations. His appointment, which was announced at the Quebec Conference in August 1943, led many to suppose that amphibious operations would form a large part of the forthcoming campaign. Mountbatten shared this belief; as Chief of Combined Ops. he had already begun sending out landing ships and craft to South-East Asia.

He also pressed for transport aircraft, ıor talks long into the night with Wingate, who had been bidden to Quebec by the Prime Minister, had convinced him that the key to jungle mobility lay in the sky above it. In the coming year he did not cease to argue and plead for more supply planes, and having launched his operations on the basis of air supply he did, in fact, secure at different times 300 additional aircraft from General Arnold, and from Air Chief Marshal Portal a further 150 planes. Mountbatten decided in December 1943 to integrate the Allied air forces in the theatre under an Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, who should direct all air operations. The first holder of this post was Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse, K.C.B., D.S.O., A.F.C. His second-in-command was the American Major-General George E. Stratemeyer, whose Eastern Air Command controlled the Allied fighter, bomber and air transport forces.

The Commander-in-Chief of the British land forces (he did not control the American or Chinese troops in Burma) was General Sir George

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"WHO STARTED THIS STORY ABOUT THE JAP SUPERMAN? . . . INTELLIGENT FREE MEN CAN WHIP HIM EVERY

Giffard, G.C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C., an officer distinguished for his leadership in the East African jungle war with Germany, 1914–18. Giffard's initiative secured for the newly created Fourteenth Army the tools they needed for their job and his dispositions placed them in the most favourable situation to undertake it. Giffard's great part in the Burma campaign is little known to the world, but it was accurately appreciated in the Fourteenth Army. To command this army Mountbatten chose Lieutenant-General Slim.

To complete the picture of South-East Asia Command we must reintroduce Lieutenant-General Joseph Stilwell. Besides being Chief of Staff to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, Commanding General of the American Forces in the China-Burma-India theatre and Commander of the Chinese and American troops of the Northern Combat Area Command (as the northern front was known), Stilwell was appointed Deputy Supreme Allied Commander under Mountbatten. His various offices may have been confusing to some folk, but not to "Vinegar Joe," who solved a number of problems by giving himself orders.

The Eastern Fleet, which was the naval arm in South-East Asia, had for many months been commanded by Admiral Sir James Somerville, G.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O. Other principal appointments were the C.-in-C. Persia and Iraq Command, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., to be Chief of Staff, with Major-General Albert C. Wedemeyer of the U.S. Army as Deputy Chief of Staff. Assistant Chief of Staff was Major-General G. E. Wildman-Lushington, C.B.E., R.M., who had been Mountbatten's Chief of Staff at Combined Ops. To sift and establish the supply priorities of this complex inter-Allied organisation called for high qualities of judgment and decision. They were found in Lieutenant-General Raymond A. Wheeler, who had come out to Burma

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TIME." MOUNTBATTEN'S CONTACT WITH HIS TROOPS WAS DIRECT, PERSONAL AND CHARACTERISTIC.

at the time of the retreat to organise supply for Stilwell, and had drawn up the American plan for the Ledo Road. At Quebec Wheeler was named "Principal Administrative Officer, whose word in priorities is to be law." "Speck" Wheeler was also entrusted with the actual administration of the entire Command, an immense task. The whole of Mountbatten's Anglo-American staff was completely integrated.

Much depended on the degree of co-operation which could be created between South-East Asia Command and India Command. For India was the administrative base, the channel of supply, and the training-ground and source of so many valiant soldiers. General Sir Claude Auchinleck, G.C.B., G.C.I.E., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E., Commander-in-Chief, India, was already charged with final responsibility for India's two million troops in Europe, the Middle East and India, as well as the Indian Air Force and Royal Indian Navy. He was now required also to direct and develop the great Indian base for the campaign in Burma. It was fortunate a cordial understanding existed between him and Mountbatten, for many administrative difficulties which threatened friction and confusion were thus solved by a personal word. To Auchinleck, and to India Command's Principal Administrative Officer, Lieutenant-General Sir Wilfred Lindsell, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., must go a considerable share of the credit for the Burma victory.

The first joint task was to increase the flow of supply to the armies in the field. For the moment, the railway remained the major form of transportation; to the Indian Railway, therefore, with its informal and leisurely procedure, the energies of both Commands' supply officers were addressed.

At Mountbatten's first conference on transportation a plan was drawn up to militarise nearly 800 miles of the Bengal and Assam Rail-

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way's metre-gauge system with American railway troops. Early in 1944 half a dozen U.S. Railway Battalions arrived and took over. Within twelve months these 4,000 men had more than doubled the volume of traffic hauled, raising it from 90,000 to 200,000 tons monthly.

While these projects for stepping-up railway traffic were being put in hand military roads from the railheads onward to the front were steadily advancing and improving. As early as March 1942 the tea-planters of Assam, responding to the urgent call of India Command, had sent volunteer labour detachments forward into the Manipur mountains to build roads whereby Slim's rearguard could retreat into India. In a few weeks they had mobilised 70,000 men to construct a highway from Dimapur to Tamu, the length of Manipur State, and to clear a way for the first stage of the Ledo Road. By autumn, more than half this auxiliary pioneer corps was levelling airfields in Assam under American direction. Nine airfields and four fighter strips were built.

Their purpose was to supply China by the air route over the Hump. This method, of sustaining in China an army so far from its bases, was an incentive to a commander facing the same problem in Burma. Mountbatten redoubled his efforts to build up air supply in South-East Asia. He secured 5 per cent. of India's cloth output for parachute-dropping and sent to England for 400 power sewing-machines to be flown out to stitch them. Meantime, Fourteenth Army managed with a home-made invention of jute, the " para-jute."

The strategical problem was complex. Mountbatten's orders were to maintain and broaden our contacts with China. This involved the reconquest of enough of North-Eastern Burma to safeguard the air route over the Hump and subsequently to reopen the Burma Road. Of course he had to hold the frontiers of India at all points. A subsidiary though colourful part of this over-all design would be the airborne invasion by Wingate of the enemy rear. To carry out this comprehensive plan bold decisions had to be made, and unorthodox methods applied.

Hitherto, the monsoon had closed down active campaigning. The opposing armies settled down behind their ramparts of mud and rain to repair and prepare for the next dry season. It was accepted that to attempt serious operations would be to invite either immediate failure or future disaster, since the troops would never recover from the strain of fighting in such conditions. Mountbatten challenged this tradition with his initial order to his Staff: " We shall march, fight and fly through the monsoon! " Flying around the front himself in the monsoon months he must have sometimes wondered why he ever thought of this idea.

Malaria he proposed to enlist as an ally. A study was made of the most unhealthy regions of the front. High on this list stood the Kabaw Valley (" Death Valley "). A Medical Advisory Division, with Army, Air Force, Navy and American representatives, sought special means of overcoming malaria, dysentery, scrub-typhus and other afflictions which abounded there. By spraying the pestilent areas with the insecticide D.D.T., by providing a ration dose of mepacrine, and by enforcing a strict anti-malaria discipline, the Command did in fact successfully defy disease. The sickness rate, which in the first Arakan campaign had been 120 sick per one battle casualty, fell in 1944 to 20 : 1 and in the next year to 6 : 1. The charge that the health of Allied troops was endangered by challenging the enemy in the Kabaw Valley was thus discounted. On the contrary, it was the Japanese, compelled to fight there without medical preparation, who suffered heavy losses from every variety of the curses of Kabaw.

It was not enough that these policies should be initiated, nor that every available resource should be developed and fortified. A still more vital, if less tangible, force had to be intensified—the fighting spirit of the entire Command.

Within a few days of reaching India Mountbatten set out to visit the troops in the line. Sometimes standing on an ammunition-box before assembled regiments or Air Force squadrons, but more often chatting with a group of soldiers by the roadside, he repeated to them what he had decided with their commanders.

" If the Japs try their old dodge of infiltrating behind you and cutting your line of communication, stay put: We will supply you by air. There will be no more retreat."

" We are not going to quit fighting when the monsoon comes, like drawing stumps at a cricket match when it rains. If we only fight for six months in the year the war will take twice as long. The Japs don't expect us to fight on; they will be surprised and caught on the wrong foot."

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"We shall fight in places like the Kabaw Valley. We have got anti-malaria devices and we shall have the finest hospitalisation and air evacuation scheme that the Far East has ever seen. The Japs, who have nothing, will have to fight Nature as well as us."

And, finally: "Who started this story about the Jap Superman? I have seen the Japs in Japan. Millions of them are unintelligent slum-dwellers, with no factory laws, no trades unions, no freedom of speech, nothing except an ignorant fanatical idea that their Emperor is God. Intelligent free men can whip them every time."

Mountbatten explained to the troops at the front and far from the news how the war was shaping in Europe, the Pacific, and in the rest of their own theatre. He promised them their own newspaper in the New Year. On January 10th, 1944, *SEAC*, the troops' daily newspaper, floated down by parachute on the forward positions. It reported an advance by the British forces in Arakan.

8. SECOND ATTACK FROM ARAKAN

BY THE NEW YEAR, 1944, the Japanese had reached the planned limit of their conquests. To consolidate their grip upon these gains, however, they had now to pay the penalty of conquerors—they could secure their frontier only by advancing beyond it. The High Command decided to carry the war into India to break up the bases where the Allied armies and fleets were building up for the general assault on Japan. They timed their counter-stroke for the early spring, a date which the British initiative subsequently compelled them to advance.

The Allies meanwhile had suffered a change of plans. After Quebec these had included immediate amphibious operations in South-East Asia; but then came the Teheran Conference, and there South-East Asia Command's landing craft had been allocated to European waters. This knocked the keystone from the arch of Mountbatten's plans. Accepting the deprivation, he still resolved to place the most aggressive interpretation on his instruction to defend the frontiers and open the road to China. Without assault craft it was impossible to launch serious invasion from the south, the obvious way into Burma. The only other way to liberate Burma was from the north and north-west, which involved crossing the mountain barrier between India and Burma. Many deemed this impossible, but Mountbatten set about proving it otherwise. In North Burma, Stilwell had begun his long march back across the mountains towards Myitkyina. In Manipur, Slim's Fourteenth Army was preparing to meet the Japanese offensive. Meanwhile, in Arakan, to derange the enemy's plans, Slim's orders were to push forward and clear the Mayu Peninsula as far south as to command the mouth of the Naaf River for sea supply, and to secure the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road. This was a 16-mile metalled highway running laterally across the Japanese front and close behind their main positions. The available troops for the British offensive in Arakan were the XVth Indian Corps, now commanded by Lieutenant-General A. P. F. Christison, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.

We have already seen how the Mayu Peninsula is dominated by the Mayu Range. This range physically split the front in half, and in the second Arakan campaign, as in the first, the Japanese plan was to use it tactically to split the British forces. The importance of the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road was that it tunnelled the Mayu Range. It linked Maungdaw, a sleepy little rice port on the Naaf River, with Buthidaung, the chief bazaar in the Mayu Valley. Neither of these places had much value in itself. Both had been already well fought over; Maungdaw had degenerated into a cluster of huts sinking into a swamp and Buthidaung claimed the title of the most-bombed village in Burma. But the strategic value of the road between them for switching troops from one side of the Range to the other was obvious. It had been originally designed as a railway line, and the gradient had been built and two tunnels had been driven through the mountain when a local steamship company purchased and closed down this competing method of transportation. In war the tunnels became a vital artery of communication after all.

The Japanese were already making full use of it. They had not advanced much beyond the

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road. Indeed, it could best be held by occupying the hills which commanded the approaches. Now, as the monsoon floods subsided, the British patrols probed deeper towards the road. They reported that the Japanese had turned the area of the tunnels into a fortress, buttressing it on either side of the Range with two strong positions. One of these lay in the coastal belt at Razabil, four miles from Maungdaw ; the other was in the Mayu Valley at Letwedet, about the same distance from Buthidaung. Christison proposed to seize these two bastions, locking up the garrison of the central position of the tunnels for subsequent destruction.

The capture of Razabil and Maungdaw was assigned to the 5th Indian Division (Major-General H. R. Briggs, D.S.O.). To the 7th Indian Division (Major-General Frank Messervy, C.B., D.S.O.) went orders to occupy Buthidaung and cut in on the rear of Letwedet. General Slim, the Army Commander, bore well in mind the lesson of the previous Arakan campaign, when the enemy had slipped round the front and threatened the army's line of communication. This time Slim planned not only to advance along either side of the Mayu Range, but also to throw out a further flank guard to march down the distant Kaladan Valley beyond the next mass of hills. The 81st West African Division (Major-General Woolner, C.B., M.C.) was detailed to carry out this task. These troops were to be supplied in their isolated advance by the transport squadrons of the newly-raised Anglo-American Troop Carrier Command. The plane bearing food and mail was new, and wonderful, to many of these warriors ; they came to feel a deep regard for " The Mother-Bird." The West Africans not only guarded Kaladan, but their presence there compelled the enemy to divert forces towards it which he later urgently needed for his plan to invade India. The first difference between the British dispositions in the two Arakan campaigns consisted in this strengthening of the left flank. The second was the development of air supply.

To link the two main forces in the coastal belt and the Mayu Valley it was necessary to make a more substantial line of communications than

The Gurkha. He is part of the jungle, lost in its light and shade. The campaign stands still while he looks and listens. The enemy may be ten miles or ten yards away. This was a hunter's war . . .

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the trails which ran over the passes of the Mayu Range. There were three of these, the Goppe Pass, the Maunghnama Pass, both mere mule tracks, and that other more famous Ngakyedauk Pass, then barely fit for mules. Ngakyedauk has since entered into the immortality of soldiers' language as " Okeydoke."

Ngakyedauk area had to be captured before the pass could be developed into the military road required. A battalion of the 89th Brigade secured it firmly, while another battalion leaned up against the enemy positions. It was not thought feasible that a solid highway could be constructed within two or three months over the knife-edged crest of the Range. But the sappers and miners of 7 Div. set up new records for the Burma Front. Equipped with bulldozers and pneumatic drills, they graded its slopes, widened its rock ledges and rounded off its elbow bends ; before Christmas they had made a dirt road capable of bearing the armour and transport of an invading army. As the engineers and road-builders reached the banks of the Mayu River, the dusty battalions of British and Indian infantry, followed by columns of motor transport, began threading their way up the steep slopes at the western entrance. Christison was building up his two-fisted attack.

His plan was to force the enemy to fight on as broad a front as possible. He had the 5 Div. firmly established west of the Range and the 7 Div. east of it. They shared the crest, which was the axis of advance. Pressing equally all along the front, XV Corps now began their steady forward movement.

At the foot of the western slopes of the Mayu Range and parallel with it runs a low line of foothills covered with scrub and stunted trees. At the southern end, near the junction of the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road and the main coastal road, where hangs the inn sign " The Three Jolly Japs," there is a horseshoe-shaped hillock. It is flanked by other hillocks, the whole chain being overtopped by the higher peaks of the Range. Together, these features form a natural defensive position of great strength. Linked by covering fire, and with the garrisons deeply dug in as they were, " Razabil Fortress " justified its title.

On New Year's Eve, 1943, as the river mist lifted from the hollows, the British guns and mortars began ranging on Point 124, north of Razabil. When it was thought that the defences had been flattened, the 161st Indian Brigade (Brigadier D. F. Warren, D.S.O., O.B.E.) advanced to occupy the ground. They found the Japanese well entrenched. It took a week's hard fighting before the first strong-point was outflanked and captured. To their surprise, the Japanese then slipped out of the second without further battle. The fall of Maungdaw the next day brought the 9th Indian Brigade shortly afterwards on to the rear of the main Razabil fortress, against the hill named " Tortoise."

The assault on Tortoise was the initial joint land-air operation of South-East Asia Command and it is worth remarking for the lessons which it taught. Tortoise was attacked first by the dive-bombers of the integrated British and American Eastern Air Command. After a bombardment by medium, field and mountain artillery, the tanks of the 25th Dragoons advanced. As the tanks rolled over the start line, there were many who doubted their battle worth. What could these 26-ton General Lee monsters do in hilly country further broken up by tidal estuaries? The tanks drove straight over the top of the first enemy anti-tank batteries and, without waiting for their own fire order, blew the entrenched guns to pieces.

The general attack was kept up for three days, with the tanks in action from daybreak until nightfall. At the finish Tortoise had been sheared bald of every twig, but the Japanese were still dug in beneath it. In spite of the methodical hammering by the artillery and the tank guns, the Japanese bunker system remained substantially intact ; it was far more elaborate than had been supposed. When at length Tortoise fell, dugouts were found 30 feet underground, with messes for officers and men connected by tunnels, too deep down to be disturbed even by a shelling that had turned a jungle-matted hill into a sand-dune. The strength of these labyrinthine defences was one of the secrets of the Japanese Army's resistance in Burma.

The second lesson learned was that the pause allowed between the lifting of the tank guns' barrage and the arrival of the assaulting infantry at the enemy's bunkers was too long. It gave his machine-gunners time to get their heads up again before the bayonet charge came in, and though the average Japanese rifleman is not a dead shot, his machine-gunner commands respect. This interval was subsequently so effectively reduced that the tank gunners continued firing until the

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infantry were almost at the mouth of the bunker.

The tank gunners worked out their own pattern of fire. First, with super-quick firing high-explosive they set the undergrowth aflame. Then with solid armour-piercing shot they loosened the earth under the timber frame of the bunker slits. Finally they planted a delayed-fire high-explosive burst inside.

By the end of January, although Razabil itself still held out, enough of the fortress area had fallen to permit XV Corps Commander to withdraw most of his armour in order to press along the other flank against Buthidaung. He was able to do this with comparative ease, because his foresight had provided him with that invaluable lateral communication, Ngakyedauk Pass.

Meanwhile, on that other side of the hill, 7 Div. was pushing down the Mayu Valley. The King's Own Scottish Borderers had snatched a foothold on a rise controlling the road from the tunnels to Buthidaung, and defied every counter-attack to dislodge them. They were cut off for a week, and got their supplies then only through the audacity of a convoy which they named "The Ghost Train." It consisted of scores of mules who nightly ran the Japanese gauntlet through the fog and across fire-swept paddy-fields to deliver rations and ammunition.

But the enemy, too, had large-scale plans. The time had come to unfold a Grand Design known to the Japanese High Command as Operation C. The object of this plan was to invade India from Arakan. It was to be done by splitting open the British front, sealing off the eastern half from the western half, and cutting the line of communication of both. Each sector was then to be destroyed separately, and the road to Chittagong laid open to the Japanese Army. Once there, they expected to incite a general uprising in Bengal against the British. The final phase would come when Slim's reserves had been committed to the Arakan battle. Then Japan would launch her main blow in Manipur, smashing the centre of the Allied front.

For the initial action, the Japanese 55th Division was redistributed into three Task Forces under the general command of Major-General Sakurai. The leading Task Force, designed to carry out the main encirclement, comprised four battalions. It was led by the formidable Colonel Tanahashi, victor of Arakan, 1943, and was named after him Tanahashi Force. His orders were to move up the left flank of 7 Div., sweep round its rear and cut Ngakyedauk Pass, trapping 7 Div. on the eastern side of the Range. A second, smaller force of battalion strength called Kubo Force was to push on over the Range and down the western slope with the object of cutting

Down River. While the main Allied forces were attacking along the Arakan coastal mountains, West African troops advanced in support down the flanking Kaladan River. In midstream, on a home-made raft, this patrol moved armed like a midget floating fort.

the coastal road from the north at the village of Maunghnama. Thus the communications of the whole of XV Corps would be severed. At the same time, a holding group known as Doi Force, mustering at least two battalions, would attack all along the line Maungdaw-Buthidaung, pinning it down over the entire front. When 7 Div. had been cut to pieces as they tried to flee across the Mayu Range, then the three Japanese Task Forces would combine to crush 5 Div., isolated from all reinforcements from the north by the road-block at Maunghnama. The Japanese assumed that 5 Div. would be able to move only in one direction—westward across the Naaf River—and Japanese maps captured later showed its shattered remnants escaping by boat in a minor Dunkirk.

The Japanese Divisional Commander described Operation C as "headlong attack." It was a bold and well-articulated plan. It depended on exact adherence to a time-table; the job had to be finished by February 10th. The only flaw in the arrangements was that the Japanese commander left out of his reckoning the stubborn resistance he might encounter. So confident was he that his blitzkrieg would succeed that he threw into the initial action almost all his available forces, leaving only one battalion in reserve, and so when losses fell upon him he had no replacements at his command. Though he did not lack artillery, he brought up other gunners without their guns, reckoning to capture his enemy's. The Japanese troops had orders not to destroy British vehicles, which would be required for the march on India. They firmly believed that Delhi lay at the end of the road.

On the night of February 3rd, Tanahashi struck. In a few hours the face of the campaign had changed.

The blow was not entirely unexpected. A week earlier West African seaborne patrols had captured documents in a raid behind the enemy lines which gave warning of recently arrived reinforcements from the Pacific front. From this and other signs, Christison sensed trouble. Unable completely to break the enemy resistance along the coast, he had already decided to shift the weight of his offensive to the far side of the Range, and an operation had been planned against Buthidaung with 7 Div. Christison withdrew his tanks from Razabil to support this new blow. They followed the 9th Indian Brigade of 5 Div. over the Ngakyedauk Pass the afternoon before Tanahashi attacked. To deceive the enemy into believing that his armour was still concentrated west of the Range, he sent up a squadron of reserve tanks to continue operations at Razabil. At the same time, one brigade of 7 Div. was placed in reserve for the coming British offensive. Both these formations in fact went into action the very next day to meet the new Japanese threat. The tanks came as a surprise to the enemy, who did not know that they were even in the valley.

The main surprise, however, which was the strength of the enemy's blow, was for us. The troops of 7 Div. were disposed over a fairly wide area, extending even beyond the Mayu River. In order to serve the general offensive, Christison had moved the 7 Div. administrative base up to Sinzweya at the foot of Ngakyedauk Pass, and about four miles south-west of 7 Div. Headquarters. This administrative base—or Admin Box as it was soon to be known to the world—had been laid out by Lieutenant-Colonel R. B. Cole, D.S.O. It had been organised to resist any interference up to a large-scale raid. What now struck it was a tornado of 8,000 men.

The moon had set and the mist was forming as the rustle and creak of pack-animals on the move was heard beyond the river. Nobody paid much attention, for it was usual that the returning ration convoys should come through during the night. However, about 2 a.m. of February 4th firing broke out, and it was reported that in the dark one of the mule convoys had run into a Japanese counterpart. Both convoys had turned back, and patrols were reconnoitring the scene of the clash. An hour later a great deal more shooting was heard, mingled with yelling in native tongues. Dawn had not yet come, and the fog still lay thick in the valley. It was surmised that the horde of refugees who had fled into the British lines some weeks before from the Japanese occupation had broken loose, and that the local Burma civil police had been compelled to fire on them. Then it was discovered that the telephone line to the Brigade Headquarters nearest to the river had been cut. The uproar was indeed the refugees. They were being driven forward by the Japanese to screen their own troops as they closed in upon the British lines *from the north.*

How had they got there? By-passing Buthidaung, Tanahashi had thrust up the far bank of the Mayu River by a forced march and had fallen

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Those wounded in Arakan, borne from the swamp and jungle where they fell, required a stoicism rare even on the battlefields. Slung first on the back of a comrade, they were taken by jeep, ambulance, airplane or river-craft to the hospital in the rear.

upon Taung Bazar. Just before daybreak, to the accompaniment of widespread air activity, several thousand Japanese infantry came marching over the hills and across the paddy-fields. In the course of the morning these troops crossed the river and began pressing down on the rear of 7 Div. To meet this new threat, Messervy brought up the brigade which had been placed in reserve. That night from 7 Div. Headquarters fires could be seen blazing a mile farther up the valley where the Gurkhas and the tanks were in action. Next day Messervy debated whether or not to shift his camp ; he had to consider the effect of this on the morale of his troops. He reports : " I cleared out the signals trucks and told our people to get packed up to move next morning if necessary." But the Japanese arrived in the course of the night.

Messervy tells how the alarm was given : " I was awakened by an outburst of yells and groans, though oddly enough I heard very few shots. I jumped out of bed, and walked about in pyjamas for an hour or so trying to find out what was going on. The whole camp was aroused, but there was confusion all around us. It was very dark. Suddenly the Japanese, with a cheer which you hear when Arsenal scores a goal at home, charged the Signals quarters. The Signalmen, with a company of Indian Engineers, were acting as Divisional Headquarters Defence Force. The

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Japanese came on in a waist-high mist which partly concealed them. They pierced only the outer fringe of the position in force, however. No Japanese actually came my way, though some who approached were shot by the Liaison Officer's batman ; the others ran back."

The raiders quickly brought their mortars into play on the Headquarters position. Soon the General Staff Office was in flames, all wires were cut, and 7 Div. communications with the outside world were confined to a single wireless link with the Corps Admin Box. Messervy decided to move his staff of about 40 officers, clerks and orderlies to a place where he could better control his division, and for this he chose the Box, about four miles away. He divided his men into several parties, and, taking charge of one himself, set out towards it. The area was infested with Japanese patrols, snipers and machine-gunners, who covered all known trails and prowled about attacking isolated units. The General, dressed in a vest and trousers, and carrying a grenade in his hand, led his men by devious paths, wading shoulder deep through a flooded chaung, or creek. They reached the Box in four hours.

The Signalmen, under Lieutenant-Colonel P. M. P. Hobson, D.S.O., held on to Divisional Headquarters to the last. Four times in as many hours their position was rushed, but though individual Japanese soldiers infiltrated into it they were all killed. The last wireless message reached the Box at 11.20 a.m. and then the listeners heard a voice say : " Put a pick through the set." Mortared and soaked with rain, the Signallers hacked their way through the undergrowth to rejoin the garrison then forming in the Box. Hobson reported that his officers and men behaved with coolness and good marksmanship. " Of the 200 Japanese who attacked with mortars and machine-guns, they killed at least 40 and wounded many more." Throughout the siege of the Box, which was now about to begin, the Signalmen performed a magnificent service. Short of equipment, with all telephone lines cut and ciphers compromised, they kept communications going. By use of guarded language general orders were issued over open wireless. Information was securely transmitted by use of local jokes which the humourless Japanese could safely be trusted not to grasp. As an extra safeguard officers talked in French, which a brigadier admits " would have stumped the French, let alone the Japanese."

All this time the Japanese had been sidestepping away towards the Range. Immediately on crossing the Mayu River the enemy commander had thrown out a right flanking force to reach the Range, and, striking southward along it, to descend on Ngakyedauk Pass ; he was now concerned to keep contact with this force. It did, in fact, arrive at the edge of the Pass and seize it.

While this action was developing, Kubo Force drove on northward towards Goppe Pass. They did not reach Goppe ; a mile or so short of it they ran into the 18th Indian Mule Company. It is typical of the new spirit of the army that the muleteers stood their ground and fought like a Guards company. Believing the Goppe Pass must be strongly held, and urgent to cut the coastal road at all costs, Kubo Force commander gave orders to storm straight over the precipitous range between Goppe and Ngakyedauk. By astonishing efforts the Japanese soldiers hauled their guns up a 1,000-foot cliffside, across the Range, and lowered them on the far side. They burst through a concentration of British rear echelons on the western slope, where they were again challenged. But driving on energetically they reached the road. Here they blew up bridges, set fire to dumps, waylaid convoys, and finally dug themselves into the near-by jungle, from where they kept traffic under continual fire. In the end these raiders had to be liquidated to the last man. They interfered with communications less than they had hoped, for much of the supply of 5 Div. continued to flow in by sea.

There was no doubt, however, of the enemy's main success. He had driven a wedge between 7 Div. and 5 Div., and Stage 1 of Operation C was complete. He did not conceal his triumph. Night and day the Japanese radio blared : " The March on Delhi has begun," " Tanahashi, Victor of Arakan, will be at Chittagong within a week," " New British Fourteenth Army destroyed in one thrust." Traitors drew up proclamations for parades under the walls of the Red Fort at Delhi, and Tokyo Rose crooned persuasively to the Allied troops in the Pacific : " Why not go home ? It's all over in Burma." It really appeared to the Japanese that everything was in the bag, and so it was. Unfortunately for Tanahashi, the neck of the bag was still open.

He had forgotten the air.

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THE SOUTHERN FRONT was Arakan, a broken coast of jungle-covered hills divided by deep river valleys. Here were fough ***the Battles of Admin Box, " Okeydoke " Pass, Razabil Cross-roads and the Maungdaw-Buthidaung Tunnels.*** *Early in* 194 ***the Japanese General Sakurai struck in force at the Allied positions on the Mayu Range, aiming to invade India. He slice through the defenders, but could not destroy them.*** *7 Ind. Div. was trapped at Sinzweya (Admin Box), 5 Ind. Div. cut off o the coast, the West Africans stranded in far-off Kaladan—but they held out. Supplies poured in from the sky, some cam by sea, reinforcements advanced down the Chittagong road. In the end Tanahashi*

Through the air would pour the supplies which were denied land passage. The troops who were surrounded, instead of yielding their ground, ditching their equipment and seeking to escape across the hills, would remember the Supreme Commander's warning—and his promise; they would hold fast, certain that within measurable time the power would be brought them to drive the enemy from his encircling lines. Both the supplies to sustain such "trapped" troops and the aircraft and air crews to carry them had, in fact, already been assembled and were prepared to go. Ten days' rations for 40,000 men had been packed up and dumped near the airstrips against such an emergency by Major-General A. H. J. Snelling, C.B., C.B.E., Slim's Major-General of Administration, the first of the series of similar services which the "Fourteenth Army's Grocer" rendered in this year of continuous fighting.

Nor on the combat side was the Army Commander caught napping. Slim had brought out of reserve the 26th Indian Division and placed it at Chittagong to cover the road to India. Still farther back, in Calcutta, the 36th Indian Division (Major-General F. W. Festing, D.S.O.) was brigaded and ready to move forward on requirement.

9. THE BATTLE OF THE ADMIN BOX

MEANTIME, in the Admin Box none sat down to wring his hands over his fate, but all set to work like men to shape it. There was gathered there a medley of about 8,000 administrative troops, pioneers, sappers, signallers, ordnance and medical units, mule companies and native road-builders. The entire regular defence force of the Box consisted of two battalions of infantry (the Royal West Yorks and the Gurkhas), about a dozen batteries of varied artillery, and two squadrons of the 25th Dragoons. Later the K.O.S.B.s and Punjabis were brought in as reinforcement. Much of the fighting was hand-to-hand. Visibility during the misty days was about 15 yards, less in the moonless nights. The experience of a jemadar of the Bombay Grenadiers is typical. Two Japanese leapt down into his trench. He shot the first, who fell on him. The second, reaching round the corpse, tried to strangle him. The jemadar shouted for somebody to throw a grenade into the trench, and a soldier obliged. The grenade killed the Japanese and the jemadar survived. These desperate days were, indeed, a soldiers' battle. While it raged, all in the Box were fighting men, and signallers, sappers, clerks and cooks seized the rifle and used it like veterans.

The Box was set in a cupped area of dried-up paddy-fields roughly a mile square. Nature had not designed it for a fortress. In the midst rose a solitary mound 300 feet high known as Ammunition Hill, but the whole area was dominated by a ring of hills. None of these was held by our troops, for the sufficient reason that we had not the strength available. Each unit made itself responsible for its own perimeter, linking up with its neighbour whenever it could. The tanks and guns formed a protection for headquarters, hospitals and "soft" vehicles. In time the various sectors of the Box ringed themselves as far as possible with wire. Brigadier G. C. Evans, D.S.O., who took over the general defence of the Box, created a garrison equal to the emergency. From Mountbatten came a message telling the garrison that he had directed immediate reinforcements towards them. "Pending their arrival," added Mountbatten, "it is imperative that every man remains at his post and fights to the end."

Evidence of his resources was what the beleagured division saw in the sky above it. Japanese Zeros had at one time been a common sight in Arakan. The arrival of the Spitfires over the front had changed that. These Spitfires were the first innovation in Burma produced by the South-East Asia Command. As a prelude to Tanahashi's blitzkrieg the Zeros had returned to the scene. Japanese documents revealed that the Japanese Air Command believed that if the R.A.F. fighters could be "drawn" into combat they could be wiped out. Though the Japanese did not give close air support to their ground troops they had appeared over the battle area, many squadrons at a time, challenging the fighters.

They had not gone home disappointed. The Allied fighters of Third Tactical Air Force, then commanded by Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., rushed at them. Out of

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39 Japanese fighters who came over one day 224 Group (Air Commodore A. Gray, C.B., M.C.) shot down 15, probably destroyed another 5 and damaged 19, all for the loss of one Spitfire and one damaged. Seven days after their first challenge the Japanese fighters broke it off. Three Spitfires had been lost. Third T.A.F. claimed 65 Japanese fighters destroyed, probably destroyed or damaged. From now on the Allied fighters flew in close support, on solitary strafing, or on recce. as they pleased, and practically unimpeded. During the height of the aerial battle the huge and defenceless aircraft of Troop Carrier Command drove in and out like a bus service between the sky fights and the roof of the jungle, delivering stores of war to the troops as they fought it out on the ground.

These supply operations were under the command of the American Brigadier-General William D. Old, U.S.A.A.F., who had been placed in charge of Troop Carrier Command, and none could have desired a more energetic or intrepid leader. When the first flight of Dakotas was driven back, General Old stepped up to the pilot's seat of the next flight and led them in himself. The planes were attacked, gunned, and some of the crews hit (General Old's plane was drilled with shell splinters), but the goods got through.

When 7 Div. formed up in the Box they had two days' rations. These had not been exhausted before Old was pouring 60 tons daily down the hatchway of the sky. The job grew. By night as well as by day supply aircraft rose from the Allied airfields. R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. crews turned their aircraft straight round and flew again. They slept barely five hours in the twenty-four. The ground crews serviced them, the Royal Indian Army Service Corps supplied them, all round the clock. Many of these staff personnel then boarded the planes and flew unescorted over the Japanese lines to help the supply-droppers heave out their cargo into the besieged Boxes. It was a true Combined Op. The pilots of the supply air crews were themselves " combined," British, American, Indian, Australian, Canadian, New Zealand and South African.

Supply-dropping is itself an art. The aircraft must fly at minimum height and speed during the process (which, when serving front-line troops, brings it within periodic small-arms fire of the enemy). To complete an accurate drop it must make at least eight circuits over the dropping-zone. During this half-hour the pilot must keep his heavy ship trim, or else the parachute will get tangled in his rudder as the loads tumble out of the doorway. For the crew it means a violent and unceasing effort to haul the crates and sacks the length of the " hold " as far as the open door, poise and push them clear. In Burma the job was complicated by the lie of the land, which placed dropping-zones in narrow valleys, jungle clearings and hollows in the hills. These sharp contours set up air turbulences, which are intensified in the monsoon: on one occasion a Dakota emerged from a cloud upside-down. When the drop took place at night, with the enemy using counterfeit signals to decoy you off your course, the fun really began.

In Arakan 900 sorties carried 3,000 tons into battle. With food, ammunition and weapon replacements came cigarettes, kit, oil, petrol, the mail, even beer. Tank troops waiting for fuel watched drums of it cascading down on parachutes. Before the aircraft left the armour was moving into action. The twin-engined transport planes were sitting birds for enemy fighters and ground fire. But only one was lost, and she, too, delivered her goods. In such circumstances, " encirclement " becomes an empty phrase.

Arakan, indeed, carried forward logically and demonstrated in the fire of battle the soundness of that air supply and support which so seized Wingate's bold mind. The R.A.F. had rarely failed during Wingate's first foot-slogging march in Burma in 1943 to find their supply-drop site and to deliver their loads. Upon this basis South-East Asia Command were now building a new concept of jungle logistics. Arakan was its first vindication. Agreed, it was a narrow margin, and even this margin depended on the individual worth of each fighting man in the sky and on the ground. This is inseparable from the quality of every combat force.

Down in the bowl of the Admin Box, under the guns of the enemy on the surrounding hills, soldiers fought on, conscious only of the fact that the hour called for every ounce of courage and endurance that British and Indian could pull forth. All day long clouds of smoke rose from the target area and the sound of explosion echoed round the hills as one after another ammunition or petrol dump blew up. Four times stocks of ammunition were reduced to a dangerously low level. Luckily, the Japanese did not realise it,

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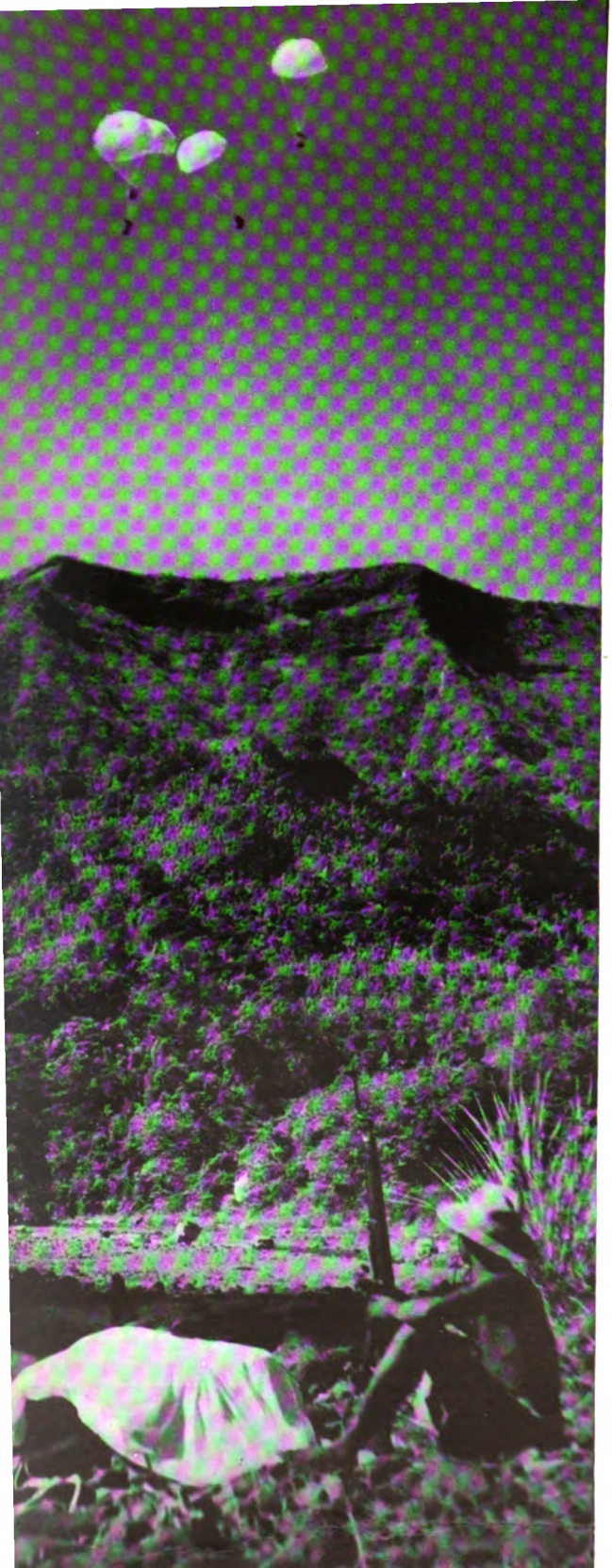

and the airmen quickly replaced each loss. But the enemy continued also to pour in a torrent of mortar bombs, grenades and shells of every calibre up to 150 millimetre. Every part of the Box was vulnerable to fire, and a glimmer of light attracted an instant hail of bullets. Wounded men were operated on within 100 yards of the spot where they had fallen. "One patient practically fell on my operating-table," said a doctor. Green-uniformed snipers roped to trees and even "built" into tree-trunks took regular toll. A veteran of Dunkirk, who had spent two days on the beaches, said he would have been ready to spend two weeks there if he could be let off with two days in the Box.

The Japanese infantry pressed hard on all sides. They were now within three days of their time limit for Operation C. By assault one of the hillocks was seized—it was called M.D.S. Hill, because three field ambulances had established themselves there as a Medical Dressing Station. There was a horrible sequel. The depleted staffs had performed miracles of medicine and surgery for the flood of wounded that surged into their huts for treatment, to say nothing of the rising number of dysentery and malaria patients. Major B. G. A. Lilwall, D.S.O., operated 252 times during the siege. Now the doctors and their orderlies were to pay the final price of duty.

The sun had just gone down behind the Range and they had smoked a last cigarette with their patients when there was a burst of shots and a Japanese party of about six officers and 60 soldiers appeared in the hospital area. They rushed through the wards howling like dervishes and cutting down everyone who stood in their way, doctors, orderlies and patients.

It was not possible that night to concentrate a sufficiently powerful force to relieve M.D.S. Hill, and the number of sick and wounded men lying in the wards prohibited shelling or mortaring it. When a counter-attack was delivered, the Japanese were merciless in forcing their prisoners to go forward, with their hands bound, as moving screens against the machine-gun fire of the tanks. They squatted in foxholes themselves and laughed. They refused dressings to the wounded and water to the dying. They

Manna. Garrisons isolated by the break-through did not surrender—they fought back with supplies dropped by parachute. The enemy's plan of attack worked well on the ground—but he forgot the air.

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killed those whose groans might reveal the Japanese positions.

It was not the worst of their abominations. Japanese cruelty was not engendered by the fury of battle. A massacre was organised in cold blood. Lieutenant S. N. Basu, Indian Medical Service, who was orderly officer for that evening, described how enemy soldiers suddenly ran into his basha as he was resting. They seized and dragged him, along with a nursing orderly, to a near-by ward where he was forced to squat on the ground before a middle-aged officer whom the Japanese addressed as "General." A soldier laid a bayonet on his head when in reply to a question he answered that he was a medical man interested in medicine and casualties and not in tactics. The General ended the inquisition by drawing his sword and waving it ceremoniously in the air. He then retired.

It was the prelude to slaughter. Japanese soldiers shot and bayoneted every man of the medical staff they could find. Orderlies and patients tried to escape in the confusion by crawling out on their bellies in the darkness through a nullah. A few of the wounded dragged themselves along with them, but most were too weak even to stir on their stretchers. As the Japanese carried out this butchery the cries and groans of the men were heard by their comrades beyond the nullah, helpless to rescue them.

The doctors fared no better. The Japanese lined up six of them and shot them dead, each with a bullet through his ear. Lieutenant Basu escaped by a remote chance. A Japanese officer pointed a pistol at him which twice misfired. At the third attempt Basu had the impression of being shot through the left ear. "I knew I was dead. I fell down, but after a time I realised I could see and think." He had the presence of mind to fake death. He daubed his face with blood where he lay. A Japanese soldier turned him over with his foot, left him for dead. Basu was able to crawl away next day, hide in a slit-trench, and eventually rejoin the relieving forces.

The West Yorks, who by a counter-attack had been able to rescue a few survivors of these murders, were also privileged to avenge them. A day or so later a party of Japanese tried to make their way along a chaung defended by the Yorkshiremen. Regimental Sgt.-Major Maloney, who commanded the detachment in this sector, describes how they detected them in the grey light of dawn "so dim that it was hard to pick out the colour of them." He ordered some of his men to hurl grenades while others he told to pull out the pins of the grenades, "otherwise we could not get the stuff into the chaung quickly enough." In fifteen minutes it was all over. When the sun came up the West Yorks counted 45 corpses in an area 40 yards square. Scattered around the banks were British rations and white sugar. These Japanese were undoubtedly men who had been in M.D.S. Hill cookhouse. They were the killers of the wounded. The place was afterwards known as Blood Alley.

It was not quite the end of the story. The Japanese are not a resilient race. They go on blindly following instructions even when the game is up. Blood Alley was a prearranged Japanese forming-up position marked in their operations orders as "No. 58 River Meeting Point." This information fell into British hands, and R.S.M. Maloney's company took post above the chaung to wipe out any more of the enemy who should arrive there. Since this new situation was *not* in Japanese Operations Orders, the enemy continued to arrive, and to be wiped out by Maloney's men.

Around the Box a bitter struggle still raged. The enemy was well entrenched and held many tactical points which called for daily counter-attack, draining away our meagre reserves. Nor did the Japanese cease to press their own attack. Regularly as the sun fell over the Range, they donned hoods and yet more hideous face-masks and came slithering through the tiger-grass, whining weird animal calls to keep touch with each other. Then the bravest defender had to steel himself at his post and remember the Night of the Massacre. Hearts sank with the sun, and they rose again as it rose. Men who had never seen the inside of a church since their choir days invoked God's mercy and His strength. Many scribbled their home addresses on scraps of paper for their comrades to drop a line home to "the wife" or "my girl" or "the old folk, just in case anything should happen."

Everything was shared. One officer, handy with a needle and thread, gave all his spare time to stitching buttons on shirts and slacks for anyone that asked the service. Many shared more —their thoughts with lonely comrades. Soldiers would worry lest the people at home might miss their letters and imagine the worst. They needed to be cheered up, and they were. Then there was sometimes the anxiety that though the air supply

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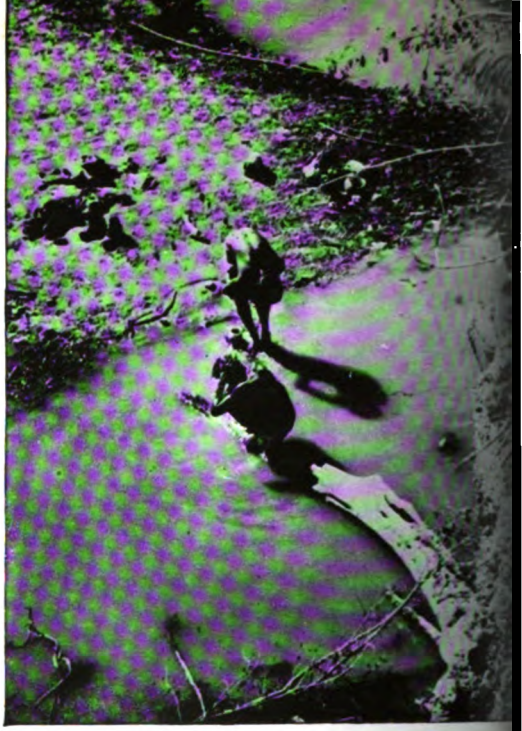
had not failed yet, perhaps . . . ? Men sick to death of biscuits and bully-beef would lay a little bit aside in their kit as though it were manna. Sleep was safest at the bottom of a slit-trench with the rats.

One of the most heartening of the great services performed by the Air Force was the withdrawal of the wounded. There was no landing strip in the Admin Box, but there was a channel of communication from it to the Box of the 114th Brigade, whose strip took supplies for the bulk of the division. A number of strips were constructed during the battle, and from them the wounded were flown out by light aircraft over the guns of the enemy, while riflemen and machine-gunners held off the infiltrating Japanese infantry. Wing Commander A. J. M. Smythe, O.B.E., M.C., ran a shuttle service of a couple of Fox Moths which carried some hundreds of men safely back to the hospitals of Arakan. This was a change from the days when it had taken a dozen bearers a day to move a wounded soldier over the Range.

An extraordinary feature of the siege was that there was a mass of motor transport, an "Ascot car park," Messervy called it, in full view of the enemy throughout the fighting. Outside the perimeter of the Box and at the foot of the hills held by the Japanese, there stood another 100 large lorries each laden with pontoons. "When I discovered that the Japanese were not destroying them but were using them to sleep in," said Messervy, "I decided to thin out the Ascot car park and stick some more of my motor transport into No Man's Land, an even more complete safety zone! The Japanese stuck rigidly to their orders that these trucks were to be preserved to carry them to Calcutta when the British had been annihilated or driven into the sea. They never fired on them, even to the end."

But now the spirit, as well as the role, of the opposing armies was significantly changing. Kubo Force, like Tanahashi Force, had achieved its initial objectives; Briggs's 5 Div. had been isolated from its lines of communication. But once again the stubborn British did not conform to the expected. Briggs and his men did not flee across the Naaf River. By February 10th, the date set by the Japanese High Command for the decision, the enemy time-table was in ruins. Seven days had been allotted to the Task Forces to do their jobs, and seven days' rations had been issued. Each force had carried out its plan and



Inside the Box. Exposed to the surrounding fire of a sleepless enemy, the Admin Box was a fortress without walls. *Above*, Gurkhas washing in "Blood Alley." *Below*, British soldiers easing off in a foxhole. *Right*, transport animals, lit by the flash of mortar bombs, huddle together in their own slit-trench.

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the British were still there. Indeed, they were fighting back with growing violence and, what was worse, fresh troops were coming down from the north.

The Japanese commander recast his programme. For the moment 5 Div. would not be driven into the Bay of Bengal. All energies would be concentrated on annihilating 7 Div. in the Mayu Valley. It was too late. Christison had already regrouped his forces and reoccupied Taung Bazar. Three times Messervy's tanks and infantry had sallied up the Ngakyedauk road to meet the relieving troops as they fought across the Pass, once getting within a quarter of a mile of them. His forward brigades engaging Doi Force had established themselves in their own Boxes, inflicting heavy casualties on the attackers and denying them the opportunity either to supply their troops operating farther north or to move their wounded to the rear.

The last phase of the battle opened.

Christison's plan to complete the destruction of the Japanese enterprise was two-fold. The first part was to reopen the coastal road which was the main British line of communication ; the second was to clear Ngakyedauk Pass and crush the thoroughly mauled Japanese striking force against the anvil of the British positions in the Mayu Valley. The hammer was Major-General Lomax's 26 Div. advancing from Chittagong.

The Japanese fought it out stubbornly, but 26 Div. broke all resistance along the road. A battalion of the 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles was the first to arrive, taking post at the western end of Ngakyedauk to block any further irruption on to 5 Div.'s positions. Meanwhile, the 8th Gurkhas and a battalion of the 16th Punjabis steadily swept the spine of the Range clean of Japanese, killing scores and herding the remainder down into the valley for dispatch there by troops defending the Box. These had already killed a fair share of the enemy—a preliminary count revealed that more than 1,100 had been buried in this area alone. The forward brigades, which had never relinquished their positions and had also exacted their price, now blocked the Japanese withdrawal. The " trapped " garrisons had become pivots of manœuvre. The arrival of 36 Div. now permitted 26 Div. to concentrate on the eastern side of the Range. Together they prepared for the final settlement.

Encircled themselves this time, and with no transport planes to feed and munition them, the Japanese began to suffer the full pains of siege. Bombers dived on their bunkers and fighters gunned their foxholes. The R.A.F. flew 9,000 sorties during the Arakan battle, the Vengeance bombers alone flying 2,500 sorties. When the planes went home for fresh bomb-loads, the artillerymen relieved them, and when they in turn paused, the tank gunners opened up. Said an infantryman : " They fired so hard you could see the country changing before your eyes."

The British attack was pressed home by a pincer movement from both sides of the Range. The siege was broken when Hill 1070 was taken after ten days' battering by aircraft, artillery and tanks. When the guns ceased, and it was thought that all resistance had collapsed, a landslide, caused by the bombardment, unearthed another score of the enemy. They opened fire and continued fighting until they were wiped out. The final sortie from the Box was made by the K.O.S.B.s and tanks, who linked up with the leading detachments of 5 Div. on the morning of February 23rd. Then Major-General Briggs came riding down Ngakyedauk Pass on a tank, bringing a few bottles of whisky and kegs of rum to congratulate Messervy and his troops on their magnificent stand. The Battle of Arakan was virtually over, and the Fourteenth Army stood triumphant on its first great battlefield.

It had smashed No. 1 Japanese Invasion of India, scored the first major British-Indian victory over the enemy, and killed and wounded 4,500 of his finest troops ; it later rose to nearly 7,000. Even more vital, the British and Indian soldier had set up a man-to-man superiority over the Japanese soldier in the field. The strategy of the Japanese High Command had been frustrated. The troops in Arakan had been neither driven out nor annihilated, nor had the road to India been forced. Slim's two reserve divisions had, indeed, been drawn into Arakan, but the enemy had overlooked that our superior air power could (as it did) shift them or their equivalent back to cover any other threatened point of the 700-mile Allied front. To make such a threat the Japanese had already massed along the Chindwin stronger forces than they had deployed in Arakan.

Above all the Allies had demonstrated their mastery of a new way of jungle warfare—the land-air method of combat and supply. In a month the planes delivered 10,000 tons, though this was chicken-feed compared with what would come. In the future battles in Manipur,

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entire divisions would be transported by air to reinforce the troops already meeting and breaking the Japanese offensive. Thus Arakan, itself a notable defensive victory, directly paved the way towards another and far greater operation in the Imphal Plain, which developed into an Allied offensive along all fronts.

The Japanese were not allowed to rest in Arakan. No victory is complete without pursuit, and Christison pressed fiercely upon the beaten enemy. To Messervy in the Mayu Valley went orders to destroy the remnant of the invading forces. With grim satisfaction the commander and troops of the " encircled and annihilated 7 Div." executed this order.

During these stirring events a further drama had been staged in the far Kaladan Valley where the 81st West African Division guarded the British flank. Making their Far Eastern debut in one of the most exacting of all terrains, the West Africans lived up to their reputation. Within a month they had built their famous Great West African Way, a 75-mile road through the jungle and across Kaladan's gorges. The men from Sierra Leone, charging with the bayonet to the sound of a hunting-horn, seized a small Japanese airfield and converted it into a strip able to take Dakota transport planes. The enemy struck back at them and the violence of his action may be measured by the total of 1,500 whom the West Africans killed. But Christison decided to pull his flank protection closer in towards him and he ordered them to withdraw to the eastern bank of the Mayu River covering Taung Bazar against any fresh infiltrations. The West Africans marched for five days through dense jungle and took up their assigned position. Both during the remainder of the siege and later, Tanahashi tried to re-infiltrate into the Sinzweya area against 26 Div., but he made no headway against the resolute sentinels of its flank.

The British counter-offensive had now, by March 10th, been developed along both sides of the Range. Against Razabil, 5 Div. resumed their interrupted attack. This time there was no hitch. On the night of the full moon Briggs launched his assault. Its prelude was an artillery bombardment by 200 guns of medium, field and mountain batteries. There was a gun to every ten yards of enemy front; probably the concentration of fire eclipsed the barrage at El Alamein. Dive-bombers then pounded the area, and it is estimated that Razabil received 200 tons of bombs and 500 tons of shells. The troops of Brigadier Warren's 161st Brigade by a brilliant outflanking stroke passed straight through the Japanese front without a single shot being fired, and threw a road-block across their communications between Razabil and the tunnels. The " fortress " fell, and though the enemy did not cease his efforts he never recovered his hold.

The strongest citadel of all, the tunnels area, was breached when 36 Div. troops rushed the approaches of the western end, and, laying a 6-inch gun on to it, touched off a Japanese ammunition dump stored there. Though the explosions continued all day long the roof did not fall in, and when the debris was removed the road was usable. It was not until April that the eastern tunnel was seized by an infantry assault supported with tanks. At Kukri Hill, which the enemy had tunnelled to the heart, the 7th/2nd Punjabis found 126 dead and one live Japanese. The garrison had fought to the last moment. The prisoner declared that the commander had then ordered his men to commit suicide. Asked why he had not himself obeyed, he replied that he had been unconscious at the time.

The Japanese contested every step with counter-attacks, and behind this unflagging tactical pressure stood 10,000 Japanese reinforcements and the possibility that they would bring in two more divisions in a major operation to coincide with their offensive against Manipur. In March and April 1944, while the Manipur invasion was at its height, the enemy actually brought forward thousands of reinforcements in Arakan.

A valuable factor in restraining his ambitions were the innumerable sorties which a West African Reconnaissance Regiment carried out among the rivers and swamps of the Mayu Peninsula. Many villages on the islands and along the coast which had been converted into Japanese strong-posts were attacked. During the crisis of the Battle of the Box the Strategic Air Force bombed Ramree Island, beyond Akyab. This was followed by a naval demonstration in the Bay of Bengal. While the assault of Razabil was being pushed home the Supreme Commander sent two Commandos (No. 5 and 44 R.M.) into the coastal belt behind the Japanese front to block his line of communication. The effect of these activities was to confuse and deceive the enemy, who could never be sure that he was not threatened by a Combined Operation.

Actually, Christison's policy on this sector

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Clearing the Ridge. The Battle of the Box is over. The Japanese are in retreat down the Mayu Range. British and Indian troops seen here are clearing "Wren Cat," one of the steep hillsides of Arakan, which they seized in a daylight attack.

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was to hold on to essentials and husband his resources. The defence of Manipur against the Japanese invasion of March had required the reinforcement of both 5 and 7 Divs., and though their place in the forward Arakan area had been taken by 26 and 25 Divs. the available air supply resources had all gone northward, too. The newcomer, 25th Indian Division, was commanded by Major-General H. L. Davies, C.B.E., D.S.O., who had been Slim's Chief of Staff during the retreat from Burma and had little to learn about the Japanese. Having fulfilled all the requirements laid upon him, from seizing the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road to clearing the Naaf estuary, Christison resolved to establish a forward line which could be held with a minimum of troops throughout the malaria season. He withdrew from Buthidaung, which would have tied a whole division to the difficult Mayu Valley. Instead, he concentrated on securing his grip on the tunnels area, while the R.A.F., from all-weather strips, made life hellish for the Japanese in their monsoon quarters. From January 1st to May 15th Gray's 224 Group claimed 315 enemy aircraft destroyed, 70 probably destroyed, and 225 damaged. Their own losses were negligible.

The key of the tunnels was the high, narrow ridge known as 551, which the enemy had held throughout 1943. He had fortified the southern peak of this ridge. The ascent to it is more than a rock wall ; it is actually concave, requiring scaling ladders. The 14th Baluchistan Battalion, detailed to make an offensive patrol against this peak, audaciously carried out their task in full moonlight. As they made their way back the Company Commander missed one of his men. He therefore returned by the same perilous rock climb to find him. This time, however, he ran into a Japanese patrol, who closed in to capture him. The Company Commander shot the leading soldier, and, seizing his body, swung it round in the fury of battle like a flail against the next two assailants. He knocked them both over the cliff. He resumed his search for his own lost soldier, and found him. Of such was the army in Arakan.

" The enemy has been challenged and beaten in jungle warfare," said Prime Minister Churchill in a special message to Mountbatten and the Fourteenth Army on the morrow of the Arakan victory. " His boastfulness has received a salutary exposure."

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10. OPERATION THURSDAY

ON SUNDAY EVENING, March 5th, 1944, a dozen officers on an Indian airfield near Lalaghat pored over a set of aerial reconnaissance photographs. These had been brought in a few minutes earlier by a pilot flying back on a mission which had taken him 200 miles over Japanese territory. On the air-strip, columns of troops in field kit were already lining up to enter a fleet of glider carriers. Some had stowed themselves inside. They were armed with rifles, tommy-guns, pistols, mortars, grenades and knives. These soldiers wore green battledress, and many were bearded.

They were men of the Special Force, otherwise known as the 3rd Indian Division, Long Range Penetration Groups, and still better known as Wingate's Chindits. (They were so named by him after the Chinthay, mythical griffin, half-lion, half-eagle guardian of the Burmese temples.) The title "3rd Indian Division" was, in fact, a deception intended for the enemy. Most of its troops were British, drawn from the former 70th Division; the remainder were Gurkhas and West Africans. There were also some American engineer units. The pilots, who were revving up their engines, belonged to No. 1 Air Commando, nicknamed on the front Cochran's Circus. The enterprise in which they were jointly engaged was known in security language as "Operation Thursday." It involved flying 10,000 men and 1,000 pack-animals over the mountain jungle, by night, far beyond the enemy lines, and setting them down in natural clearings in the heart of Burma. If you had raked the earth you would not have found two leaders better qualified to carry through this operation than Wingate and Cochran.

Wingate had much developed his ideas of jungle warfare since his 1943 march into Burma. That had been in the nature of a reconnaissance in force; this was to be an invasion. Then, the troops had gone in on foot and had been supplied by air-drop. Now, the troops themselves were to be flown in. The 1943 expedition had been a series of raids against communications by lightly armed bands, a game of ambush, booby-traps, and melting away again into the shadows. For his 1944 campaign, Wingate proposed to erect strongholds deep in the enemy zone, and, once established, to launch large-scale operations around these fortified bases. It involved flying in not only mobile columns and garrison troops, signal installations, ack-ack and 25-pounder batteries for jungle fortress defence, but also engineer units equipped with bulldozers and mechanical graders to construct airfields capable

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Eve of "Thursday." The gliders form up on the airfield, the tow-ropes are combed out neatly in line. Soon, an army of green-garbed Chindits, British, American, Gurkha and African, will be moving by air to battle—over the enemy and into his rear.

of handling a regular air supply service. However remote the selected sites might be, the enemy were sure to discover and attack them within a few days. So the sappers had to work fast.

In his own phrase, Wingate aimed "to insert himself in the guts of the enemy." Initially, this was to be accomplished by going not where the enemy was, but where he was not. To neutralise the Japanese airfields in North Burma, for example, it would have been necessary to seize them by airborne landings, and this would certainly be stoutly resisted. Far better to pierce the vulnerable arteries which sustained four enemy divisions in the field and a still respectable air force.

The full policy of Long Range Penetration did not take shape in Wingate's brain overnight. He lived long with it, altering, adapting and rejecting many an idea. At the Quebec Conference Wingate drummed continually on the need for developing airborne supply. This had been one-way traffic during his first expedition. Then, to be shot in the leg was often worse luck than being shot through the head, for the foot-slogging

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columns could not carry their wounded along with them. But suppose you could evacuate your casualties by air? Mountbatten realised that this (and much else that they debated) would require special air units. When General Arnold inquired how he might aid the new South-East Asia Command, Mountbatten put forward this suggestion. Arnold at once acceded, and assigned Colonel Philip Cochran and Colonel Robert Alison, two of his star pilots, to work out the details. No. 1 Air Commando was born, so named in compliment to the former Chief of Combined Ops. Wingate has recorded that "had this unique force not been provided the operation could never have been carried out."

In Cochran's Circus, South-East Asia Command found men who had mastered both the art of lifting and towing gliders and the more intricate practice of "snatching" gliders off the ground by tugs already in the air. The value of this technique in evacuating wounded from inaccessible glades and paddy-fields would be demonstrated hundreds of times in the coming campaign. Cochran was himself a pilot of exceptional skill and daring, who at the age of 33 had become the legendary hero of "Flip Corkran's Adventures" in American newspaper serials. He proved to be a loyal and imaginative comrade of Wingate.

Long Range Penetration has two requisites: (i) power to penetrate deeply; (ii) power to stay there. Though Wingate set a limit to the period that men could endure the conditions his campaign would impose, he intended to relieve and replace them, not to withdraw the Force itself.

Before these operations could begin, there was a further service Wingate required of the air forces. Would they sweep the sky clear of all interfering enemy aircraft, and keep it so? The co-ordinating air control of Operation Thursday had been placed in the hands of Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin, Commander of 3rd Tactical Air Force, and he not only covered the enemy airfields but arranged deception sorties to simulate night landings in areas remote from the real landings. The bombers of Strategic Air Force (led by Major-General Howard C. Davidson, U.S.A.A.F.) ranged over Rangoon and the Irrawaddy River ports. They dealt such blows that the Japanese seem to have suspected Lower Burma was about to be invaded. Every enemy effort to discover by deep reconnaissance what was really afoot was defeated by the Spitfires of 221 and 224 R.A.F. Groups, and to this sure shield Operation Thursday owed much of its success. Meanwhile, around the chosen landing grounds, Cochran scorched a wide aerial fire-belt, driving back the Japanese fighters from their advanced bases. The pilots of his P.51 Mustangs loaded 1,000-lb. bombs under each wing, and went in to low-level attack. In these initial strafes and in their unflagging co-operation with the Chindits after the invasion had been launched, Cochran's Circus discharged a million and a half pounds of explosives on the enemy.

Everything was now set for D-Day of the first Allied airborne invasion. Five brigades, amounting almost to the bayonet strength of a couple of divisions, were to be set down on three landing grounds, "Piccadilly," "Broadway" and "Chowringhee." These clearings (they were no more) were situated in the triangle Mogaung-Indaw-Bhamo, and had been earmarked by Wingate from the ground-floor during 1943.

The plan was that the first wave of troop-carrying gliders should land, signalling to those following if the enemy was found to be in unexpected possession. Once the gliders had cast off their tow-ropes, of course, they had to go in—and, once in, they had to stay in. The tow-ships, stripped bare to haul the heavy loads, had hardly petrol enough after release to get themselves home over the hostile jungle. The first wave would occupy the clearing, fan out, and screen it while the second wave arrived. This would contain more troops, bulldozers and graders, and also combat engineers to build an air-strip between dawn and dusk, so that the next night the C.47 Dakota aircraft could bring in an army, with its guns, wagons, jeeps, animals and heavy wireless sets.

Once established in this region, the Chindit columns would strike against the railway, road and river systems which served the Japanese army operating against Stilwell's Chinese-American forces. These were approaching from the north through the Hukawng Valley, hauling their Ledo Road with them. To guard Stilwell's right flank, one of Wingate's Brigades (the 16th,

Over the Top. Riding its slender tow-rope the glider sails over the Chin Hills. Presently, above a clearing in the jungle, the pilot will slip his cable and go down. Crashing, belly-flopping, tearing off broken wings—no man knows how the landing will be. And the landing is only the beginning.

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commanded by Brigadier Bernard Fergusson, D.S.O.) had been marching for a month through the Naga Hills on the west, parallel with his line of advance. They were now nearing the invasion area. Cochran sent off a photo-reconnaissance pilot for a last look round.

And then—disaster. The photographs disclosed that huge trees had been felled across Piccadilly, so that no landing there was possible. Had Operation Thursday been betrayed at the eleventh hour? Broadway was still clear, as the same set of photographs showed, but how long would it remain so? Or, perhaps it would be left clear—and ambushed? For a moment Wingate questioned if the operation could now be mounted at all. But General Slim, who was present with Stratemeyer, Baldwin, Cochran and Old, firmly intervened against postponement. The enemy undoubtedly knew of Piccadilly, where the landing of a Dakota had been photographed in the American magazine "Life" the previous year. It was reasonable to assume that the log obstruction of this clearing was no more than a routine precaution. Said Slim, who rarely reveals either elation or depression, "things are seldom as bad as they seem." The effect on morale of a postponement had also to be weighed. The risk was calculated, and taken. Cochran walked off to re-brief his crews.

The order was to switch to Broadway the troops who had been bound for Piccadilly. The landing on Chowringhee was scheduled for the following night. It seemed unlikely that the total of 80 gliders could be landed on a single strip during the hours of darkness, but as many as possible were to be launched.

How to explain the change of plan to the crews, who for weeks past had been briefed and rehearsed with maps and models of Piccadilly, and now had to be told that their mission must be carried out in a new and strange area? With superb sense of leadership Cochran began, "I say, boys, we've found a better place to go to."

An hour after the hitch had occurred, the tugs rolled up the runway to their start lines. The first gliders, towed in pairs, were harnessed. The tugs' engines roared up, and the machines were cast loose. Bouncing, swaying, and straining, the aerial train rushed down the strip in a whirlwind of dust, hauled itself up over the trees, and set forth over the 8,000-foot mountain barrier for the heart of enemy-held Burma. It was twelve minutes past six o'clock.

So began a movement which was until the invasion of Fortress Europe the greatest airborne adventure of the war. Long after night had come the tugs continued taking off from Lalaghat at five-minute intervals. They were within radio call of their base, and linked by telephone with their gliders. Not one in twenty of the airborne troops had ever flown before. No fighters escorted the air armada, which travelled without lights and had been ordered to land by no other illumination than that of the moon. All depended on surprise—and no man knew what lay at the end of his journey.

Over Broadway, the tugs circled to pick out the dark strip between the trees. Then—"Good luck!" and the gliders cast off and went in.

Of the 67 gliders that flew, 32 landed on Broadway. None was hit by ack-ack fire, though several were fired on; 9 came down in the enemy lines, 11 on friendly soil. The other 15 were turned back by signal because of the congestion on Broadway, and returned safely to their base. The crashes and crash-landings between the two points were due to the parting of tow-ropes unable to bear the strain of the double loads. Some of these accidental descents had an unexpected value, for they occurred almost on top of Japanese Divisional Headquarters, 100 miles from the scene of operations. The enemy could not have been unaware of the exceptional traffic overhead that night, for the sky was filled with the roar of engines. But when his sentries were fired on, he seems to have been misled into believing that a series of flying Commando raids was taking place.

Meanwhile, all had not gone according to plan at Broadway. The advance party gliders had landed, but the Control Glider had been forced down on the banks of the Chindwin River. No guiding brain, therefore, directed the procession of arrival on the strip. Lacking a ground control, gliders overshot the mark and ploughed through the deceptive ground beyond, which was cut up by timber-hauling ruts and buffalo-holes overgrown with grass. Other gliders came to grief on the strip itself, and, as they piled up, the next arrivals crashed into them. On the crowded runway, men heaved frantically and tore their muscles dragging the wrecks clear. Then the cry would rise again, terrible in its urgency, "Gliders!" The next wave was diving in.

One glider, loaded with a bulldozer and other heavy machinery, whipped over sharply to avoid

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Broadway in Burma. To the right of this aerial view lies "Broadway," one of the landing strips built by the Chindits far behind the Japanese lines. It was built in a day, with spades and with bare hands, for almost all the mechanical equipment designed for the job was lost in the first mêlée of landing. Note the four crashed gliders—three near the strip and one in the paddy-field, centre.

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a wreck and plunged into the wall of the jungle at 60 m.p.h. On either side the trees tore off its wings, the fuselage rushed on with its load, by now wrenched loose from its moorings. When the fuselage halted at last, the bulldozer continued its momentum. This worked the hinge by which the pilots' seat is swung upward to let the vehicle drive out. Pilot and co-pilot were thrown into the air, the bulldozer shot out beneath them, and they landed back unhurt. " I planned it just that way," said the American pilot.

But there were grim scenes, too, where the surgeons amputated by light of the moon, and there were gliders that crashed far beyond in the jungle with a frightful cry—and then silence fell while men hunted frantically in the darkness for their dying comrades.

The casualties were lighter than anyone dared expect. Twenty-three men were dead, and as many more injured. Four hundred troops and many stores had been delivered. But almost all the mechanical equipment, so necessary for clearing away the debris quickly, had been lost. Brigadier Calvert, whose 77th Brigade was the spearhead of the air invasion, decided to halt all further traffic towards him. At first light the engineers of the U.S. Army 900th Field Unit began to level the surface by hand. Thirteen hours later the first Troop Carrier Command transport landed safely, bringing reinforcements and evacuating the injured. That night 55 Dakotas came in to Broadway. This transportation continued without hitch or interference by the enemy for five more nights.

Meanwhile, the gliders had opened up a second branch at Chowringhee, south of the Irrawaddy bend (Broadway and Piccadilly both lay north of the bend), and with the same speed four columns of Brigadier W. D. A. Lentaigne's 111th Brigade, with its headquarters, were carried in.

The operations of Troop Carrier Command were supervised (and its hazardous first flights led) by General Old, who long ago had made himself familiar with these landing grounds by flying low over them in moonlight. His transport service worked so smoothly that one illegitimate passenger, bound for Imphal, found it more convenient to fly from Lalaghat via Broadway than by the recognised route. The Dakotas made 660 sorties and the gliders 78 ; they transported 9,052 troops, 1,360 pack-animals and 250 tons of equipment, at a casualty cost of 121 men. Not a single Dakota was lost. Four days after they had landed the columns were marching off along the jungle paths to start business on the Japanese communications.

Wingate determined not to sit upon the doorstep of his achievement. The approach of Fergusson's marching brigade had raised his strength to 12,000 combat troops. They were planted, in truth, " in the guts of the enemy," and not even yet located by him. But this period of immunity was rapidly running out. Wingate gave the order to abandon Chowringhee and move across the Irrawaddy towards a new stronghold which he had planned about 40 miles west of the railway. It was named " Aberdeen," after his wife's home.

It was not too soon. The Japanese at last reacted. Two hours after the rearguard of Lentaigne's brigade had withdrawn from Chowringhee, the enemy bombed and strafed the burnt-out gliders on that abandoned strip. Within a few days Fergusson had hacked a clearing at Aberdeen, and on March 23rd a fourth Chindit brigade (the 14th, commanded by Brigadier Tom Brodie) was flying in. Operation Thursday was over.

It was Wingate's last, as it was his finest, exploit. Tragedy set a seal upon his triumph. Flying towards India the next evening, his plane was lost in a storm. An American pilot, landing about midnight, reported that he had seen a machine crash in flames on a mountainside in the Naga lands. Air and ground reconnaissance parties went out, and eventually found the charred remains of a Mitchell bomber. Thirty yards away from the wreckage lay Wingate's battered " coal-scuttle " topee, which had been a landmark to every man in his command. With this singular soldier perished the American crew and two British war correspondents, Stuart Emeny of " The News Chronicle " and Stanley Wills of " The Daily Herald."

What Wingate might ultimately have accomplished will never be known. Mystery, and mysticism, too, threaded the man's life. You could never quite distinguish where the real and the romantic merged in him. He acted, and also exhibited, as when he walked around with an alarm-clock dangling from a chain and ringing periodically " to remind people that time was passing." He survived his adventures long enough to impose much of his pattern on the jungle war. Some critics complained that his

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Special Force or " Private Army " was an extravagant venture; there is no doubt he demanded (and obtained) for it unusually generous supply. Others considered that there should be no " specialising " anyway, but that all troops in the Burma theatre should be equally well trained and equipped. This was a sincere if unintended tribute to " the Man," as Cochran called him.

His Command devolved on Brigadier Lentaigne, D.S.O., one of his most trusted lieutenants.

11. THE WAR OF THE CHINDITS

IT WOULD BE too complicated to chart the movements of Lentaigne's thirty-odd columns, for some of them marched a dozen times over the same track. The story of Fergusson's brigade may be taken as representative of the experiences of the Chindits.

It was February 5th when Fergusson, a blue-eyed, six-foot Highlander, monocle firmly screwed in his eye, led his men out of Ledo in the valley of the Upper Brahmaputra under the shoulder of the Hump. They included the Queen's, Leicesters, Reconnaissance Regiment, Royal Artillery and Royal Signals. The Recce. men had discarded their motors and the artillerymen their guns; marching across these unmapped mountains with gradients of one-in-one they proved themselves equal to the sturdiest infantry. The youngest of Fergusson's men was 19 years of age; the oldest was 45.

No trails led to the south; the Chindits made their own. Often they had to carve a path through the undergrowth with machetes, relieving the relays of sweating men at the head of the column every three or four minutes. Some days they advanced only a couple of miles.

The hills were so steep that men had to crawl on hands and knees, and they were so slippery with the rain that pours in torrents in this region, the wettest on earth, that even the mules fell. Fergusson reported: " It was the worst track I ever saw animals go over. I do not recall any stretch of level going more than a hundred yards in length." With the brigade, all the way from Ledo, marched their mascot bull, Oscar the Chindit. He carried sick and wounded men on his back, and was beloved.

Fergusson's men were equipped with the same kind of kit as Wingate's pioneer expedition, and relied even more on air supply. Few human beings inhabit this desolate tract, and for many days they did not even sight a Japanese. Level areas, suitable for supply-drop, were not easily found, and rations and ammunition would come parachuting down only to get caught in the top-most branches of the trees. Then a marksman would be called for to shoot the bundle free—a delicate operation when a case of grenades was involved.

At other times hungry troops would hear the roar of planes circling overhead in the mist, and even see them diving with fearful risk through the grey shroud to find the men they were supplying. Then down would float the precious load—only to have the wind lift it at the last moment as it was about to land, and drop it gently over the edge of the precipice. Men then had to pull in their belts and make three days' rations last for five. Food means much to soldiers at all times. Tramping through an evil-smelling jungle, drenched by rain, dried-out by noonday's sun, drenched again by night's heavy dew, food (and tobacco) become an obsession.

When the Chindits crossed a jungle track each man made his own way so as not to wear a path. The rear platoon swept dust over the footprints. The men worked in pairs in almost every form of activity, fighting, marching, making a bivouac, cooking, eating and washing.

They had covered 100 miles in this fashion before they came to the tawny Chindwin, the river they must cross to enter into the heart of the Japanese domain. An eye-witness describes how the first marching column emerged from the jungle in single file, hungry, weary, weighted down with equipment, leading their mules and oxen. They trudged to the water's edge, and as dusk fell camp fires sprang up along the fringe of the trees. The drone of aircraft sounded.

At the first throb of the engines all flames were doused. The plane wheeled overhead flashing a message, to which the bivouac made answer with a lamp. Then suddenly petrol fires blazed up in the form of a huge letter L, the first plane roared

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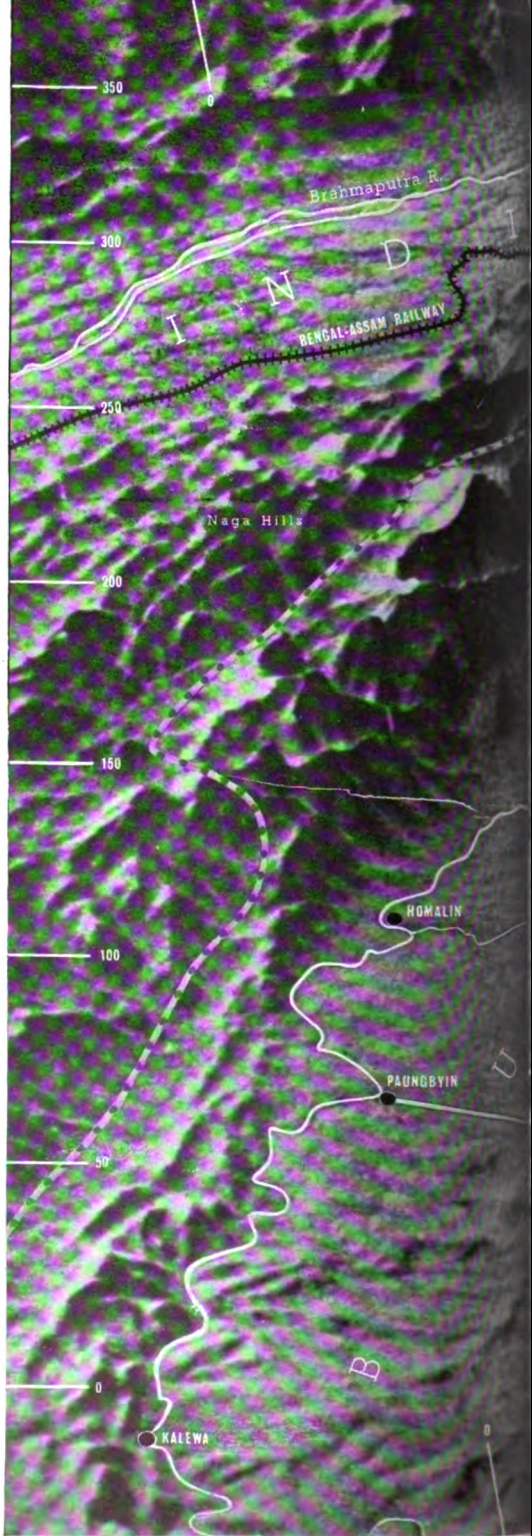
down over their heads, and out of its dark hull came a cascade of sacks. They contained letters from home, food, ammunition, cigarettes, newspapers, even snuff and spectacles.

It was the job of the Leicesters to build the bridgehead on the far side of the Chindwin, but where were the bridges—or boats? Again the planes came, towing gliders high above the river, bringing rubber boats with outboard motors. They landed on a sandbank and unloaded, and a few minutes later the Leicesters had set up their bridgehead, without a single casualty. "Hannibal eclipsed!" cried Wingate, who came in with Cochran in a light plane to inspect them. The march continued, making a detour to destroy the Japanese garrison at the jade-mine centre of Lonkin. By mid-March, as we have seen, the brigade had arrived at Aberdeen and fortified it.

Turning south-east then, Fergusson launched a surprise attack on Indaw, a built-up area of dumps, vehicle parks and aircraft on the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway. It was this railway which supplied the enemy forces in North Burma opposing Stilwell's advance from Ledo down the Mogaung Valley. The assault was made by men who had covered 80 miles in the previous five days. For half of this time they had been without fresh water, and wounded men had drunk rusty container water used to cool the machine-guns. Indeed, the fighting at Indaw circled round the desperate effort of the Chindits to force their way down to the banks of the Meza River. It was in vain. From well-sited bunkers the enemy covered every approach with machine-guns, and our men suffered the agony of seeing, almost touching, the water and being denied the taste of one drop of it.

It had been one of the British objectives to occupy the air-strip at Indaw. But the Japanese were able to concentrate rapidly along the railway from either end, and though Brodie joined with Fergusson they did not together possess the strength to seize and hold Indaw. It was not the primary role of Long Range Penetration troops to fight prolonged engagements away from their strongholds. They did battle with the equipment they carried on their backs. And so, with ammunition and rations running low, the two brigades drew off from Indaw. In all, Fergusson's men marched 600 miles. Though his operation achieved no great strategical success, as an example of courage and endurance this march will rank with the finest of all time.



THE NORTHERN FRONT. It lay in a curve of mo jutting from the Himalayas—20,000 square miles of for upland, without roads. The Japanese, established at My and Mogaung, had all the communications of Northern behind them. To approach them in strength the Allies cr

...ursday" brought 10,000 glider troops from India and set them ...wn across the Mandalay-Myitkyina Railway. Their job was ... disrupt the enemy's supply and so lessen resistance to Stilwell ...ming down from Ledo. The main blows of the Chindits are ...own on the map above in broken line. Meanwhile Stilwell ...as fighting south with his Ledo Road. With him marched Americans, Chinese, Gurkhas and Kachins. In May Merrill's Marauders seized Myitkyina airfield; then the town itself was captured. Thus began the liberation of Northern Burma. When the Japanese finally collapsed, Northern Combat Area Command, including the British 36 Division, struck south from this front to join the attack on Mandalay.

Meantime Calvert's brigade had marched out of Broadway, and, striking westward, also assailed the railway. At Henu his men erected their famous road-rail block of " White City," which had been better named " Red City," from the blood that flowed there. It was imperative for the Japs to remove this block, which was throttling the life out of their troops in the Mogaung Valley. They brought up light tanks and 150-mm. " coal-scuttle " mortars to support their infantry. Calvert's gunners replied with 25-pounders and Bofors. A ferocious battle followed. Men of the South Staffs, Lancashire Fusiliers and 6th Gurkhas attacked with bayonet and rifle-butt. The Gurkhas and West Africans engaged with their native knives, the Japanese with their traditional two-handed swords. An incessant rain of grenades burst over the heads of the fighters and among the groups inextricably mixed up in personal combat. " Mad Mike " Calvert, with fixed bayonet, led the Gurkhas forward. An officer who was there describes White City battle as " mediæval." Its characteristic was its savagery. " The conduct of our troops," says this officer, " was beyond all praise. The Staffords had to advance up a gradient of one-in-two in the teeth of murderous machine-gun and rifle fire. They went up that hill as steadily as if they had been on manœuvre. Many scores of bodies lie there, with faces shot away, testifying what they went through. But they reached the crest and took no prisoners. Japanese snipers still swing in the trees to which they had lashed themselves before they died." The battle continued through the night, while overhead the air transports went on delivering supplies.

At dawn it was seen that the Japanese were digging themselves in on a hill overlooking White City. Immediately an assault was launched to dislodge them. The cost was high. When the general counter-attack was unleashed the enemy fled, leaving his wounded on the ground. But he came back, time and again, striving furiously to break the grip on his communications. An eye-witness describes how the Japanese rushed blindly into minefields and over booby-traps, and were blown to pieces or else mown down like autumn corn by riflemen and machine-gunners. Howling like hyenas, they piled up on to the wire, which by morning was festooned with bodies, many of them stripped naked by the explosions from mortars and grenades. Scores were killed by their own Bangalore torpedoes, which they carried to blow gaps in the barricades.

At a crisis of the battle, Cochran's Air Commandos planted a load of high-explosive on Japanese concentrations preparing to move up. The pilots had been reluctant ; so short was the distance separating the forces that they feared to hit their own men. But urged by the troops and guided to their targets by R.A.F. pilots serving with them on the ground as " spotters " at visual control-posts, they unloaded on the enemy everything they had, destroying hundreds. Visual control-posts later became a widely used device for calling up aircraft to bomb or strafe enemy positions which were checking the attack. White City was never taken by the Japanese, though in May the Chindits abandoned it on establishing a new jungle Tobruk further up the railway line in the Hopin Valley. This was at " Blackpool," 30 miles south-west of Mogaung.

Blackpool was the stamping ground of Lentaigne's old 111th Brigade, the " Ghost Force." They included the Cameronians, King's Own Royal Regiment, the troops of two Gurkha units and the Royal Artillery. After their withdrawal from Chowringhee they had crossed the Irrawaddy and moved towards Bhamo at the same time that a mixed British and Kachin force struck down along the Chinese frontier to cut the Bhamo-Myitkyina road. This latter force actually entered China at one point, reappearing to operate against Myitkyina from the east. Lentaigne's brigade returned to harass the enemy, who were desperately holding on to Mogaung and Kamaing. By an 80-miles march over the mountains they descended on Hopin. Here they were within a few minutes' aircraft flight of the Japanese front line against Stilwell.

The Japanese struck back violently against this new challenge. For two weeks they flung strong forces against the post. In the final assault, which began on May 23rd, they brought up 105-mm. and 75-mm. artillery. During one bombardment 300 shells fell inside the perimeter within an hour. The garrison gave up its airstrip and prepared to fight it out. It meant sacrificing the service most valued of all by the troops (and most uplifting to them)—the flying-out of their wounded. The hard decision had to be made. As it was, with superior strength, both in men and arms, the Japanese broke through the perimeter and contested the possession of the commanding hills. But now the time of the

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The Men Who Were Thursday. They were the green ghosts that haunted the Jap, that lived in the jungle, struck in the dark and carried their wounded with them. They fought a battle unlike any other in the war.

monsoon had come and as the clouds closed in, precluding further airborne supplies, the brigade evacuated Blackpool. They had fought for 20 days and nights, and now faced a march through the morass of the Indaw Valley towards the hills around Mogaung. They tied their wounded on their backs and set forth, slashing a path through the elephant-grass, hacking foot-holds up and down precipices of mud, wading along tracks which had become torrents.

By this time the whole front was ablaze, for the Japanese had delivered their last and greatest attack on India a few days after Operation Thursday had been launched. The airborne invasion of Burma, which had captured the imagination of the world by its novelty and daring, receded in interest as it merged in the general campaign of the Fourteenth Army. The battles at Kohima and Imphal, where the main power of the Japanese Army was held, and broken, took the centre of the stage, and the marching and manœuvring of the Chindits in the mysterious forests beyond the Chindwin were obscured.

Their contribution to the defeat of the Japanese on the Ledo front was considerable. For three out of five months they blocked the railway to Myitkyina, main Japanese base in North Burma. Rarely did the enemy risk sending up a large convoy. A few motor transports would make a dash for it at night, running the gauntlet to their own front line. The Chindits spotted one troop train moving along in daylight ; they called up

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the air force, which came over the hills from Imphal and wiped it out.

As important as any military operations, the Chindits demonstrated once more that British and Indian troops can fight back long after the enemy consider that they have had enough. " I do not believe the British soldier is braver than any other," says Slim, " but he is brave for longer, and it is the extra ten minutes that count." The soldiers of these roving columns needed that quality of endurance above all. They had to carry their household on their back—food, blankets, cooking utensils, medical gear, besides their weapons and ammunition. They possessed pack-animals, but there were heavy wireless sets, mortars, and wounded men to be strapped on these or placed on a ring-saddle, and there is a limit to the number of mules that a column can usefully employ. Sickness and wounds were the hardest problem. Malaria was impossible to avoid. You cannot wear a mosquito-net while marching, and if you wear a veil it is torn to pieces. On the other hand, if you smear yourself with anti-mosquito cream it stops up your pores, and you nearly burst from heat exhaustion. Other jungle curses were jaundice, dysentery, scrub-typhus and Naga sores, which turn septic and spread like prairie fire. Some soldiers' backs were blanketed with elastoplast strips to cover these raw patches. Such items are inseparable from jungle war, and troops in all zones suffered from them. But the marching columns far away in the enemy country had to wait for the planes to evacuate their casualties. They owed a double debt to the doctors and medical orderlies who marched with them.

Evacuation by air was the supreme service which Mountbatten's forethought had secured for his Command. Several thousand of the Chindits were brought out to the hospitals and leave centres in India by this method. The pilots flew across mountains three times as high as Snowdon, in storm, darkness and enemy fire. There is weather in these parts which will toss a transport plane upside down, spin it as a leaf in a gale, or tear its wings off. The controls ice, instruments go haywire, water pours in through the joints as by a forced-feed spray, lightning flashes along the wings and round the airscrew. Such are the conditions that had to be fought to carry out Mountbatten's order " Fly through the monsoon." The pilots would start off from India in cloud down to the level of the tree-tops, cross the frontier mountains without catching a glimpse of them, and emerge over Burma in sunshine—perhaps to find a Japanese fighter waiting for them. Then the message would come through to base " Zero on my tail, warn all aircraft," and another brave man had gone down.

There was no air recovery service in the jungle at that time. Forced landings were not often possible. You had to bale out, and then you had a 100-mile walk ahead of you. Out of 30 pilots in succession who were forced down, ten successfully made that journey home. The strangest flying of all was done by a couple of Sunderland flying-boats. The Sunderlands had been designed for submarine patrol work, not to fly over Himalayan mountains. Nor had their pilots been trained for such work. But they stripped off their guns to give their aircraft greater lift, and skimming the trees to creep under the Japanese fighter net they put down their hulls on Indawgyi Lake in the heart of the jungle. " *Gert* " and " *Daisy* " took safely to India more than 600 sick and wounded. When the water was too rough for them to come in, a fleet of outboard motor-boats used to ply northward up the river to the American lines in the Mogaung Valley. This " Chindit Navy " evacuated another 1,000 patients.

When the men came out of the jungle after five months they were pretty tired, and they showed it. Bearded troops seem always to look more gaunt, and most of these had shed many pounds of weight. They asked first of all for their mail—that blessed Letter from Home—and may Home never forget it. To a sergeant who had taken a fine part in these incredible marches and battles and had been wounded in the head, his wife wrote : " I expect you're having a good time in a garrison town and not half as busy as you say." " It was still worth having," said the sergeant.

Wingate had signalled them a day before his death : " One day you will be proud to say ' I was there.' " Those who were there and returned will remember others who did not come back. There was the machine-gunner who refused to leave his gun for 48 hours, though enemy fire had set the jungle round him blazing and the rubber pipe of his gun was melting. There was the wounded sergeant who twice threw himself from the mule on which his comrades had placed him because he would not

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slow the march and imperil their chance of getting through a Japanese encirclement. And there was the major who got his fatal bullet at an ambushed well while searching for water for his men. He ordered them to leave him, asked for extra ammunition for his rifle, sent a message to his wife, and remained lying there waiting for his last enemy. So soldiers and airmen drawn haphazard from the towns and villages of Britain, India, Africa and America, of all kinds and races, and of varying ages, stuck it out through one of the hardest campaigns in history. Whatever else he did, Wingate made men see a star above the battlefield.

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12. STILWELL'S ROAD

ONE DAY during the monsoon when Mountbatten was flying over the Hukawng Valley on a visit to Stilwell, he inquired the name of the river that lay beneath. "That's not a river," said an American officer who accompanied him, "it's the Ledo Road."

The water covered the road, and some surveyors considered this to be proof of their perspicacity when they had said of the Ledo Road project: "It is impossible." On the other hand, Stilwell's favourite file contained an estimate which stated that the job could be done with 200 men and three bulldozers. Over this particular stretch of swamp the American engineers constructed a two-mile wooden causeway within 40 days and nights, so that the road rose again above the flood, and the stores of war rolled forward without halt to the front.

The Ledo Road begins at the village of that name, which is one of the railheads of the Bengal-Assam railway in the valley of the Upper Brahmaputra. It winds up the passes of the 5,000-foot Patkai Range and emerges at Shingbwiyang. It crosses the broad bowl of the Upper Chindwin, threads the Hukawng and Mogaung valleys, and so goes down to Bhamo and the Burma Road.

Even before the war the British had prospected the Patkai Mountains for a road from Assam into North Burma. The need for building a line of communication to the Allied armies in Burma in 1942 revived interest in these plans, but it was not until Wavell agreed with Stilwell to make the Ledo Road an American task that the drive of a great engineering organisation was applied. That occurred on December 1st, 1942, when almost all Burma had already passed into the hands of the Japanese. There was no time left then to acquire information as to the topography, soils, and river behaviour. The roadmakers found out these things for themselves.

No drum-beats heralded the start of the Ledo Road. Though it has not lacked recognition since, it was long before security permitted the mention of it. What existed previously was a path for mules, the refugee trail along which the exodus from Burma had stumbled two years earlier. The Americans would bring to these wild hills bulldozers, power-shovels, caterpillars, cranes, steam-rollers, in massive mechanised procession from the United States production-lines 12,000 miles away, across two oceans and past three continents. They would hack a path through the tangle of swamp and forest, climb the clouds and carve a ledge along the cliffs above them. They would build a road there, more majestic than the Romans made, 30 feet wide, double-tracked, metalled, trenched, banked and bridged. Under the blazing sun, in dust, in mud and mist and rain, building even by moonlight and paraffin-flare, the roadmakers would advance at the rate of a mile a day.

Mountains, malaria, and the monsoon were the angry gods who fought the roadmakers, and water was their master-weapon. In 1944, the year of completion, 175 inches of rain fell in Northern Burma. It not only submerged long stretches of the valley road; in the hills it piled up behind the culverts and pushed the entire roadway over the shelf. It flooded the rivers 30 feet in a night, and swept away the bridges (there is one every three miles from Ledo to Yunnan). Worst of all, the rain churned the loam of the Naga Hills into a mud sea. The "rock" there is no more than shale, which grinds to powder under the wheels of traffic, making more material for mud. The only surfacing material available is the gravel scooped from the rivers.

The Road demanded much, some said it demanded All. Yet the engineer's concept did not dictate the soldier's strategy. They inter

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acted, or if you prefer it, merged. In jungle war, despite Wingate's brilliant diversions, the grand campaigns, at that time, still moved along the narrow ribbons of the landward lines of communication. The adjacent wilderness was commanded by the possession of the milestones. There is, as we have seen, one variation of these logistics—unlimited air supply. We had good air supply in the northern campaign, but though it can serve emergency perfectly, it is in general the least economical method and we never had it unlimited. To liberate North Burma and reopen an enduring line of communication with China there had to be a Ledo Road.

The operational plan was that Fourteenth Army should develop pressure along the Manipur front, besides pushing on in Arakan. Wingate's airborne Chindits would disrupt the rear of the enemy troops facing Stilwell. Later, as Stilwell's advance deepened into North Burma, the Chinese " Y " Force from Yunnan would cross the Salween River and attack from the east. Stilwell was to be supported in the air by Brigadier-General John F. Egan's Northern Air Sector Force (a part of 3rd Tactical Air Force), and the bombers of the Allied Strategic Air Force (Major-General Howard C. Davidson). Aircraft supply remained in the hands of Brigadier-General Old.

The available troops for immediate employment were Stilwell's American-trained Chinese 22nd and 38th divisions, and a new all-American infantry formation. This had been originally offered to Mountbatten by General Marshall at Quebec, but after being trained in Long Range Penetration with Wingate's Force they were turned over by Mountbatten to Stilwell's Northern Combat Area Command. All the men were volunteers for the job. Following a call from the President of the United States in the autumn of 1943 " for experienced jungle troops, for a dangerous and hazardous mission—somewhere," they had flocked in from General MacArthur's Command, the Pacific theatre, and the jungle training centres in the United

Fighting Road. It coiled like a river out of the Ledo hills to run straight through the thick forests of the plains. It was thirty feet wide, double-tracked, metalled, banked and bridged. It was built by black, brown, yellow and white men, toiling together. As Stilwell drove ahead, pushing the enemy back on Myitkyina, the road sprang up behind him.

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States. On arriving in India they had been given these eight weeks' further intensive preparation in jungle weapons and tactics and taught to work in harmony with the aircraft which were to supply and support them. They were formed into 5307 Composite Regiment, but before many weeks they became known as Merrill's Marauders, after the name of their Commander.

This was Brigadier-General Frank Merrill, a 39-year-old ex-ranker, who had subsequently passed via West Point to a U.S. Army staff post in Japan. There, at first hand, he had studied the Japanese Army on manœuvres. In 1942 he served with Stilwell in Burma, so that he knew both the enemy and the country he was to fight in.

This was the method of Stilwell's march. First went his American-trained Chinese divisions. They drove the Japanese before them. On either side, in flanking movements which swept deep into the hills, moved Chinese and American patrols. These forces deceived the enemy, distracted him, cut into his rear, threw road-blocks across his retreat. On the heels of the fighters—often alongside them—came the trail-blazers, engineer recce. parties hacking a trace with axes, working out gradients as they went. Behind them came the first bull-dozer, often armour-plated, shoving its way forward wherever it could get, scraping out the " combat road " for immediate battle supply. Mine-detecting crews worked a few yards ahead of the bulldozers. Last came the main highway builders, blasting their track, metalling it, constructing steel bridges that would hold against the floods, cutting a swathe twice as wide as the road on either side of it to let the sun come in and dry the surface. All were armed, for the Japanese never wearied of sneak flank raids. Then men would drop the pick and seize the bayonet, or perhaps fight it out with the pick.

Chinese, Chins, Kachins, Indians, Nepalese, Nagas, Garos, slashed, hauled and piled. In one camp 2,000 labourers spoke 200 different dialects. Negroes drove machines. Black, brown, yellow, white men toiled shoulder-deep in the streams, belt-deep in the red mud. Bulldozers were buried when rain-soaked shelves collapsed and slid into the streams 1,000 feet below. After a cloud-burst in some places the road would literally be lost. A mule one day sank into the mud out of sight. In these early days when the engineers were sometimes barely hanging on to what they had won, the traffic information would come back: " The road is jeepable by pushing . . . the road is now open to foot passengers." Incessant toil in storm and heat played havoc with men's health. Eighty per cent. of the engineer company at the spearhead of the road went sick. Said Colonel Hirschfield, the officer in charge of the jungle base at Shingbwiyang, " You have not got to be insane to do this job, but it helps."

Stilwell moved on ; the Road followed. Down it flowed wagons, weapon-carriers, guns and tanks. The maker of the Road was the imperturbable, silver-haired Virginian, Major-General Lewis A. Pick, who designed the Missouri dam to irrigate a million acres. He had more water than he wanted on the Ledo Road.

The roadmakers on their march constructed four airfields and many liaison strips to support combat and supply operations. Some of these were made under artillery fire. They built two large jungle bases, with hospitals, repair shops, garages and warehouses to stock an army. They shifted hundreds of thousands of tons of earth and timber. These tasks were accomplished by ten engineer battalions.

Stilwell's march began towards the end of 1943. He was over the mountains by the New Year, and building up his base at Shingbwiyang. He had to fight his way forward from this point. His advance was often a manœuvre of double encirclement. Behind the Japanese front he had inserted a layer of Allied troops, and beyond the enemy opposing these there would be a still farther advanced Stilwell echelon. Vinegar Joe had some other surprises for the Japanese.

Held up by a road-block, he sought to strengthen his attack with armour and accordingly signalled Colonel Rothwell Brown's Chinese tank unit, which was finishing its training at Ledo, " Will your outfit work ? " The word came back, " Most of them can drive a bit and most can shoot a bit." Stilwell ordered, " Send 'em down as fast as they'll travel. If they only drive behind our lines it'll be a helluva help to morale." The tanks came slithering over the unmetalled road, driven by peasant boys who three months before had hardly seen a railway train. A couple of tanks went over the khud in the storm and darkness. The rest got safely down the steepest gradients on the road, lashed to a bulldozer which dug its blade into the surface to act as brake.

Until they came to Shingbwiyang this unit's experience of action had been confined to hunting

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water-buffalo. They went into the jungle to rustle up the Japanese patrols and crashed straight into the base of a Japanese division preparing for a counter-offensive. In the dark one tank went headlong through it and plunged into the river, where it instantly disappeared. A second tank overturned, and the Japanese swarmed over it like ants to butcher the crew. But the rest formed a defensive leaguer with the Chinese infantry scraping foxholes between the armoured vehicles to complete the ring. They dragged their wounded inside it, and the operators wirelessed to Stilwell their information. A few days later, at Walawbum, the Chinese 22nd Division, reinforced by Marauders and supported by these tanks, broke the front of the Japanese 18th Division, the conquerors of Singapore. They regained jeeps, armoured cars and trucks of American origin that the enemy had captured at Rangoon. They also acquired a purely Japanese trophy—the official seal of their 18th Division.

Stilwell pushed on up the Hukawng, his Chinese 22nd Division sweeping the western slopes, his 38th Chinese Division the eastern. It took him several weeks of hard fighting. The road followed him as his shadow, and alongside it came a four-inch oil pipe-line. All was going well. Fergusson had passed the Chindwin guarding his far right flank. On his near left marched Merrill's Marauders. On his far left a mixed force of Gurkhas and Kachin levies operated southward from Fort Hertz against Sumprabum. It was at this moment that Wingate set fire to the Japanese rear.

On March 19th, his 61st birthday, Stilwell crossed the pass from Hukawng Valley into the Mogaung Valley. His troops claimed a total of 4,000 Japanese killed. Then—thunder on the right! The scene suddenly changed. The Japanese were pouring over the Chindwin, heading towards Dimapur and the Bengal-Assam railway that was Stilwell's life-line. Vinegar Joe looked over his shoulder, and he would have been crazy not to do so. He had been instructed by General Slim, under whose tactical command at that time he had agreed to serve, to occupy the Mogaung-Myitkyina area. Should he now halt and detach one of his Chinese divisions to guard his line of communication?

Slim debated the same problem and reached two bold decisions. First, he instructed Stilwell to continue his advance, for Mountbatten had ordered up reinforcements from Arakan and India to hold the invaders in check. Secondly, what should be done about the Chindits, who had been airborne into Burma with the purpose of assisting Stilwell's plans? Slim ordered them to carry on with their original task, which they did, much facilitating operations in the Mogaung-Myitkyina area.

So while the Fourteenth Army commanders parried the enemy's blows, Stilwell punched him. At Shadazup and Laban his infantry cut up the Japanese garrisons; at Inkangtang he had flung in heavier tanks, manned by Chinese crews, and overrun their well-entrenched gun emplacements. Some of his tanks got lost in the undergrowth and their crews would probably have been forced to abandon them, but aircraft on reconnaissance took photographs of the surrounding country, which they dropped to the tank crews to show them the best way home.

The Japanese bore their reverses with less fortitude than was expected. In many a bunker captured during the Allied advance they were found hanging by the neck with their own belts. Others had chosen the traditional method of hara-kiri; in one place Stilwell's men unwittingly interrupted a pair of the enemy about to cut their throats. Other prisoners, being brought in to Command post to be interrogated, and being treated decently and even given a cigarette where they had expected torture, burst into tears and bowed their thanks with hands clasped together in servile gratitude.

It would not be proper to leave the Mogaung Valley campaign without a word about Stilwell's Chinese troops. They had been marching and fighting now for six months and had acquitted themselves with considerable credit. The Chinese infantryman moves about his business in his own way and at his own pace. Stilwell rates their quality as soldiers as high as that of the Japanese, and that level commands respect. Colonel Brown's Chinese tank column killed more than 2,000 enemy between Maingkwan and Walawbum with less than ten weeks' training. Most of the troops are youthful by Western standards; some were as young as 15 and few in the ranks are older than 25. One determined adventurer who smuggled himself over the Hump in a rice barrel was nine years old.

The Chinese are surely the best walkers in the world. The Eighth Route Army walked 6,000 miles across China in twelve months, fighting

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Merrill's Marauders. As Stilwell struck down the road he developed a left hook which reached far out into the jungle. This was Merrill's American task force, travelling light and supplied by air, which sprang upon the retreating enemy and harassed their flank and rear.

most of the way. And "John Chinaman" carries all he possesses on a pole balanced on his shoulder.

There were some other magnificent marching troops in Stilwell's Command, and they were the Americans led by Brigadier-General Merrill.

Merrill's Marauders included infantry (with heavy weapon platoons), engineers, signallers, medical units and muleteers. The force comprised three battalions, each being divided into two combat teams of about 400 men. Roughly, these combat teams equalled in strength the columns into which Wingate organised his Chindits. Seven hundred mules accompanied the march, which began from Margharita, near Ledo, on February 7th, 1944. The 2nd Troop Carrier Squadron was assigned the task of air supply, and they carried it out in all weathers, dropping an average of 15 tons a day. The marching teams set out in high spirits. As a private wrote to his wife, " My pack is on my back, my gun is oiled and loaded, and as I walk in the shadow of death I fear no son-of-a-bitch."

They walked 18 days before they sighted their first Japanese, and that was in an ambush at Lanem Ga. The opening volley killed the Marauders' lead scout, Private Robert Landes. He was the first American infantryman to be killed in war on the continent of Asia since the Boxer Rising. From this point onward it was a four months' campaign of ambush, counter-ambush, encirclement, siege, and slogging it out along hand-cut trails through the jungle and up and down hillsides. In some areas the Japanese stood and fought every few hundred yards. Driven out of one bunker stronghold, they

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Blood on the Road. Another arm for Stilwell was the Chinese force which came into Burma from the east. The Japanese soldiers and horses lying here were killed by its shellfire. Grotesque and swollen, they stay where they fell, while the Chinese push on down the smoking valley.

retired to another, meanwhile laying the lost position under prearranged mortar fire. Merrill's advance was slowed down on occasion to a mile a day. He was never late, however, when Stilwell counted on him to appear in flank or rear of the Japanese whom the general was driving in front of him down the Mogaung Valley. In this close and often confused fighting one of the difficulties for the Marauders was to distinguish their allies from their enemies, for the Japanese frequently appeared in Chinese uniforms.

The local Kachin tribesmen gave Merrill's men much help in this matter. They had suffered long enough under the Japanese to have developed an uncanny sense of them. Some claimed they could smell them. Their knowledge of the jungle, and of the habits of the Japanese, was invaluable in laying or averting an ambush. Their spirit is illustrated by the smiling urchin of 13 who appeared at Merrill's headquarters with a Lee-Enfield rifle and bandolier, which he had taken from a dead Japanese, and asked for ammunition. "I want to fight the Japanese," he pleaded; "I am not afraid of them, but there are only two of us left in our home now, and I am afraid of the dark."

On May 17th, as Stilwell's main forces closed in on Kamaing, came the electrifying news that Merrill's Marauders, brigaded with a Chinese regiment, had seized Myitkyina airfield, 50 miles away across the mountains. They had scaled the 7,000-foot Nauri Hykit Pass, and by a forced march of 20 days along secret paths, appeared suddenly on the air-strip. The enemy had no glimmering of this approach. His intelligence seems to have advised that Mogaung was the

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The Strike at Myitkyina. On May 17th, 1944, Myitkyina airfield—main link in the old India-China air route—fell to a surprise attack by Merrill's Marauders. They had appeared suddenly on the air-strip after a 20-day march along secret jungle paths. The picture shows the airfield during a counter-

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ack by enemy Zeros. A C.47 takes off through the smoke another, which is burning. In the foreground lies a ad Japanese. Myitkyina, the town, fell ten weeks later.

threatened point and his troops were reinforced there. Meantime at Myitkyina the Chinese seized part of the town by assault, but in the confusion of the night some units came under the fire of their own machine-gunners and a withdrawal was ordered. They continued to dominate the railway, thus interrupting all communication with Mogaung, the next big station down the line.

The besiegers were themselves cut off from all land communication. But—they had the air. Five hours after the Marauders occupied the air-strip, gliders loaded with airborne engineers and their equipment came sailing in. First to appear was the inevitable General Old, coming to see for himself if his big transport aircraft could land in that flood of mud. Shortly afterwards came another familiar figure, Vinegar Joe himself, whistling softly and musing: "Well, well, it seems we are at Myitkyina." By next morning the strip had been shaped up well enough for transports to land with their cargoes of supplies and reinforcements. Among the first troops to arrive there were British ack-ack gunners from the Fourteenth Army. The enemy artillery had the range of the strip, and by day they played upon it. At night their snipers crawled as near as they dared and fired into the Allied camp.

In the town, which stands in a loop of the Upper Irrawaddy, the Japanese had 1,500 determined defenders, deeply dug-in. Beyond the Irrawaddy a column of Lentaigne's 111th Brigade known as "Morris Force" (Lieutenant-Colonel J. R. Morris, D.S.O.) operated from the east, cutting the main Japanese communication with the garrison. By night, however, the enemy managed to ferry fresh troops across the river. To the west, Calvert's brigade stormed Mogaung, effecting a junction there with the Chinese troops advancing from Kamaing. Mogaung had been the great Japanese base in North Burma; it was a desolation when Calvert claimed it. The Mustangs and Tomahawks of 10th U.S.A.A.F. had done a thorough job. When the Chindits went in with bayonet and grenade hardly a wall was standing or a branch remained on a tree. There was nothing living, not a dog or a cat, and no Japanese escaped from this ruin.

Thus enemy rail communication with the south was finally severed. So worn and battle-stained had become the uniforms of all the armies fighting in this wilderness that the Chinese and Chindits

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tied orange strips to their hats and arms to distinguish each other from the Japanese.

The battle for Myitkyina continued. A long, grim, foot-by-foot struggle. The garrison were prepared to fight it out to the last soldier in the last bunker—and to give them credit for their courage, they did. The task of the besiegers was to prise them out one by one, for the depth of their bunkers defied field artillery and all except direct hits by dive-bomber. Even flame-throwers did not shift the defenders. They lay doggo until the barrage lifted and the assault went in. Then up rose the machine-gunners and did their deadly work. Holding their fire until almost the last moment, these Japanese gunners indeed behaved with very great resolution and skill. So close was the fighting that at one time the besiegers held four out of eight railway cars coupled together in a siding. The Japanese held the other four. Stilwell energetically pressed the assault, throwing in companies of U.S. combat engineers from the Ledo Road as infantry. They acquitted themselves gallantly.

The besiegers were steadily reinforced while the besieged diminished. The problem of supply became the main one. Throughout the action everything was borne in, or out, by air. Artillery (the 75-mm. field-pieces were Chinese-manned, the ack-ack batteries British-manned), ammunition, rations, medical supplies, all were carried on to the strip in every kind of weather and under fire, for the enemy lines were 3,000 yards away. Their Zeros also attacked the transport planes. American fliers crowned their previous supply efforts by bringing in, in pieces, two 155-mm. howitzers. Planes landed in darkness, in a cyclone of mud created by their own propellers. They evacuated both the Myitkyina and Mogaung wounded, who had been flown in by light recce. plane. Doctor Gordon Seagrave's surgeons and nurses, stationed in a revetment just off the runway, operated on 100 men a day.

Enemy-held Myitkyina was dive-bombed repeatedly by American planes. In return the Japanese brought up a medium artillery piece, "Pistol Pete," which shelled the strip intermittently.

But now the ring had closed round the doomed garrison. Lentaigne's troops, who had passed under the over-all command of Stilwell on May 17th, the day the air-strip had been seized, now covered the eastern bank of the Irrawaddy. Parties of Japanese who made the attempt to escape by raft were spotted and wiped out.

Fresh Chinese troops arrived to reinforce the final attack on Myitkyina. Brigadier-General Theodore F. Wessels made no mistakes; this was the pay-off. In the night Chinese patrols infiltrated the enemy's positions, fanned out, and began to work back on the rear of his forward troops. The assault went in with bayonet and bazookas, while from the sky the American planes bombed 40 yards ahead of the infantry waves. "Nobody will ever tell me any more about close support," said Wessels. At 3.45 p.m., August 3rd, the last enemy post fell, and Myitkyina was captured. The siege had lasted 78 days. In the eight months campaign, 22,000 Japanese had been killed, 3,650 at Myitkyina. The total number of prisoners was 200.

Stilwell took his bow before a world audience. He was given his fourth star, promoting him to the rank of full general. He had said "Myitkyina" and meant it when many considered it a pious hope. Until Stilwell came the Ledo Road and pipe-line had been an idea in a man's head; he made them a reality in stone and steel. He had employed on his task some of the finest fighting material of five nations, American, British, Chinese, Indian and West African. He had been backed by all-powerful Air, and an impressive park of mechanical roadmakers. He had seemingly a pipe-line from the U.S. Treasury, too, for the roadmaking cost 137,000,000 dollars. But the dynamo that drove this entire apparatus forward had been the will of a man—Stilwell.

The strategic values of Myitkyina were considerable. It was already before the war a station on the old China-India air line, avoiding the more hazardous route over the Hump. Its airfield is capable of great expansion.

Secondly, Myitkyina meant a further giant stride along the Ledo-Burma Road to China, though in fact that road now by-passes the town and goes straight down to Bhamo and thence to Wanting on the frontier. The pipe-line was more valuable than the road; but it could hardly have been laid without the road.

Thirdly, Myitkyina stands on the broad Irrawaddy below where the river rushes out from the gorges of the Kachin Hills, becoming navigable for barges and rafts. From this river port, as from Mogaung, it was possible to ship stores downstream to the Allied armies marching southward on the road to Mandalay. Finally,

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Mogaung-Myitkyina, with the airfields the conquest brought, provided an advanced bomber line for the campaign against the enemy in Central Burma.

This followed almost at once, and one of its prime gains was the clearing of the Japanese from the remaining area which lay between the Allied forces and China. Barely two years after Stilwell accepted responsibility for building the Ledo Road it joined hands with the Burma Road and become a highway stretching from Assam to Kunming, 1,040 miles in length.

13. THE MARCH ON DELHI

WHILE STILWELL was blasting a way to China through the jungle and the Japanese, the enemy was engaged in a design no less ambitious. He proposed to invade India. The attack through Arakan also had this aim, but it had been a subsidiary effort to distract and divide the defence. This new movement was the grand offensive, and to back it the High Command threw in the greatest land force they had ever deployed in South-East Asia. While Allied priorities in North Africa had withheld equipment and reinforcements from Mountbatten's Command the Japanese had built up their strength in Burma from four to nearly eleven combat divisions.

The Japanese plan, known to their staffs as Operation U, had been shaped as early as 1943. The field selected was the State of Manipur, immediately behind the central front. The operation had a threefold purpose: (i) To cross the frontier and seize the main Allied advance base at Imphal, destroying the British position on the central front. (ii) To cut the Bengal-Assam railway, which was Stilwell's supply lifeline, breaking up the northern campaign and forcing Stilwell back on Ledo. (iii) To overrun the Assam airfields, disrupting the airborne traffic over the Hump to China. This would dry up the petrol flow which kept Major-General Chennault's U.S. 14th Air Force bombing over Occupied China, and stop the munitions supply to Chiang Kai-shek's armies. By these few bold strokes the enemy might again sever every kind of communication with China and this time force her out of the war. Glittering prizes, and the Japanese unsheathed sharp swords to gain them. Success in this matter would offset many recent failures in the Pacific.

General Mutaguchi's Order of the Day to the Japanese invasion forces on the opening of the campaign said: "This operation will engage the attention of the whole world, and is eagerly awaited by a hundred million of our countrymen. Its success will have a profound effect on the course of the war, and may even lead to its conclusion. We must therefore expend every ounce of energy and talent to achieve our purpose."

Accordingly, 100,000 crack Imperial troops were detailed for the task. They were versed in jungle warfare, and rehearsed in some other matters also. One item impressed upon them was that an enemy remained an enemy whether he lay wounded on the ground, or on a stretcher, or even in a hospital bed. In all such events the recommended method was the short thrust and twist of the bayonet; ammunition was to be conserved for battle. The plan for the offensive was, as usual, exacting. The High Command were justified, however, in relying on their troops to carry out the tasks which were set them. It was in expecting the Allies to conform to their purpose that they repeated their mistake of underrating their opponents.

Fourteenth Army Commander Slim did not regard his enemy with the same optimism. He had not believed for one moment that the Japanese had shot their bolt in Arakan. He foresaw a fresh offensive across the Chindwin River, and he pondered three alternative methods of meeting it. (i) He might anticipate it by launching his own troops across the Chindwin. (ii) He might fight the Japanese on the line of the Chindwin. (iii) He might withdraw his troops from the frontier into the plain of Imphal, and fight the decisive battle there.

If he adopted the first course it would mean meeting the main Japanese force with a river at his back, and relying largely on the air for his supply throughout the monsoon. If he adopted the second he would still be dependent on a precarious line of communication through jungle mountains. Slim chose the third course; it meant that the enemy would suffer these dis-

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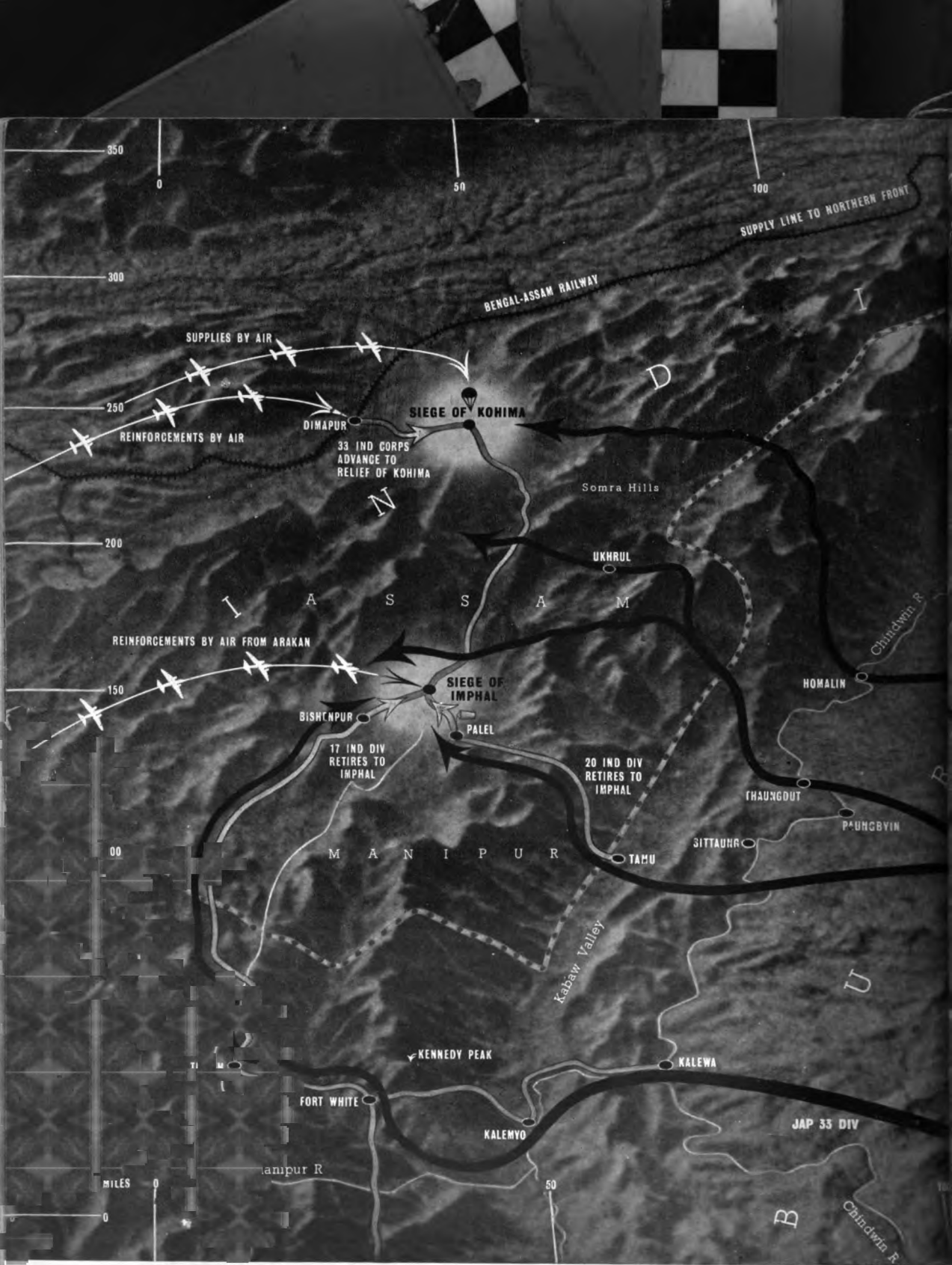

THE CENTRAL FRONT. Along this line of hills the Allies fought and won the most crucial battle of the whole campaign. In March 1944*—a few days after the Chindits had been dropped in the heart of Burma—a Japanese army,* 100,000 *strong, struck west across the Chindwin. It was the enemy's last great bid to capture India. He advanced with great speed; the Allies drew back over the frontier to Imphal and Kohima, and by April those two bases were cut off. It was touch and go; India and the entire Northern Front were threatened. But once again the trapped defenders, supplied*

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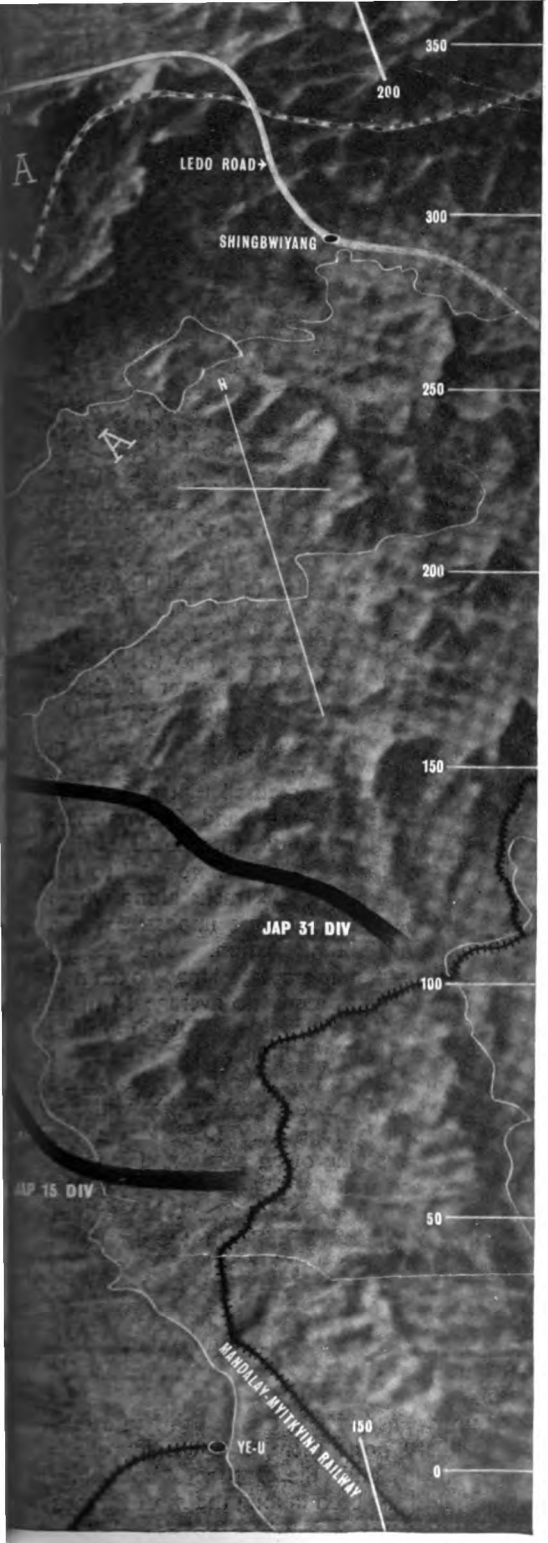

from the air, fought back. Kohima was relieved in May, though it took months of hard fighting to clear the mass of the enemy from Manipur. But by December they were in retreat and they never came back. The advance of the Allies began.

abilities—and without any comparable air supply to help him out. To implement this decision it was necessary to prepare Imphal Plain for battle, and to withdraw the extended forces and concentrate them. Slim conferred with Lieutenant-General Geoffry Scoones, C.S.I., O.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., Commander of the IVth Indian Corps, who were the available troops in this sector, and with Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin, Commander of 3rd T.A.F. On the plans thus drawn up the Battle of Imphal was fought.

Imphal Plain lies 3,000 feet up in the heart of the Manipur mountains, which wall off India from Burma. It is formed by an opening in the gorges of the Manipur River as it tumbles through the Naga Hills on its course to the Chindwin at Kalewa. The plain, which is shaped like a pear, is about 600 square miles. The entrance to it from India is by the north, past Dimapur and up the steep Kohima road, and so down into the valley. To the south, roads continue from Imphal via Tamu to the Kabaw Valley, and via Tiddim to the Chindwin. They march along the high, narrow shoulders of the mountains with a 1,000-foot drop on either side into the jungle valleys. In the two years since the retreat from Burma, IV Corps sappers had steadily improved these communications, laying hundreds of miles of metalled and banked highway, working largely with basket and spade. The only other exits are from Imphal Plain by track eastward to Ukhrul and westward to Silchar.

This green plateau in the mountain borderland provided the British with an invaluable base, both for defensive and offensive operations. To serve their forward troops on the frontier they had built up there large depots, dumps, administrative establishments, hospitals and labour camps, as well as a couple of airfields and four fighter strips. Round Manipur's pleasant village capital of Imphal an almost self-contained community life developed. Offensively, Imphal Plain in British hands remained a threat to the Kalewa Gap, which debouched on the central plain of Burma, the heart of the Japanese power. From the air point of view Imphal offered the R.A.F. operational sites close upon the battle-front. In enemy hands it would have been a sword hanging over the centre of the Allied line and the air route to China.

By this time, March 1944, Allied air superiority had been so firmly established as to be taken for granted. But though the Spitfires of 221 Group

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(Air Vice-Marshal S. F. Vincent, C.B., D.F.C., A.F.C.) held the sky over the plain, destroying or probably destroying 60 and damaging more than 50 Japanese Oscars and Dinahs in the three months around Christmas, and the American Long Range Lightnings and Mustangs had driven him from his forward strips, the enemy still had power to interfere with Allied air supply. In this he was in alliance with the weather.

Over Imphal the weather did its worst. Extraordinary commotions were set up in the air above the 8,000-foot mountains. In the dry pre-monsoon season, dust particles hanging in the sky made it impossible to see around for more than a mile. In the monsoon, banks of cloud rose from a base at 1,000 feet above the plain to a height of 30,000 feet. With them came electric storms and a rainfall that reduced visibility to nil. Flying into a wall of water, even heavy bombers and Dakota transports would be flung spinning downward, or driven up uncontrollably until the crew collapsed from lack of oxygen. The Japanese sneak fighters hung around the edges of these airquakes, or stole in under the cloud at low level to catch planes landing or on the ground. These things made it harder to maintain a smooth supply.

The backbone of the air defence of Imphal was three Spitfire squadrons, supplemented by four Hurricane squadrons and a detachment flying Beaufighters equipped with night-fighter devices. Ack-ack batteries supported the air battle and claimed a fair proportion of the destroyed enemy.

The land dispositions were that the 17th Indian Division (Major-General "Punch" Cowan, D.S.O., M.C.) covered the approaches to Tiddim, the 20th Indian Division (Major-General Douglas Gracey, O.B.E., M.C.) watched the Kabaw Valley, and the 23rd Indian Division (Major-General Ouvry Roberts, D.S.O.) lay at Ukhrul, with brigades extending south-east of Imphal town. Within the plain, Corps Commander Scoones ordered headquarters and administrative troops to site and wire defensive "boxes" and brush-up their weapon training. The R.A.F. likewise protected their fields and stations. A jungle Stalingrad began to take shape.

The Japanese proposed to employ three divisions for their main thrust—the 33rd, 15th and 31st. Of these, the 33rd Division was to approach Imphal from the south and invest it, cutting off the British troops in their farthest outpost at Tiddim. These were then to be annihilated by smashing them against a series of road-blocks thrown across their only path of withdrawal to the north. To effect this the enemy were reinforced with tanks and divided up into mobile columns with orders to strike across the Tiddim-Imphal road at separate points.

The Japanese 15th Division, starting ten days later from higher up the river, was ordered to sweep northward round Imphal town and encircle it from the remaining points of the compass. The job was to be accomplished in a few days and "in spite of all hardships."

The Japanese 31st Division was required to seize Kohima between Imphal and Dimapur, which was Fourteenth Army railhead. There it would be poised 40 miles above Dimapur, and would be able to sweep down into the Assam plain and cut the railway wherever it chose. Kohima itself was a pleasant hospital hill station where drivers decorated their trucks with the roses that grew there.

The High Command realised that speed was the key of their plan. Imphal and Kohima must fall before Allied reinforcements could arrive. The stores that they contained were vital to the invader's own supply. The tracks along which his advance was planned were impossible as a regular line of communication. The animal transport (the Japanese employed many oxen and even elephants) was ordered to average 14 miles a day "or else serious trouble will fall upon the forward troops." With all their energy the High Command took risks which can only be called reckless, and with the one matter that will not bear risks—that is logistics. Logistics is the moving and supplying of an army, and it is an almost exact science.

It was March 7th, two days after Wingate had landed his airborne Chindits in the heart of Burma, that Japanese patrols began pressing upon the British outposts around Kennedy Peak. This was a 9,000-foot mountain beyond Tiddim which acted as a sentinel against the enemy coming up the road from the river-crossing at Kalewa. Though even drinking-water had to be carried up Kennedy Peak, the British had established artillery posts there, and the gun-duels between them and the Japanese mountain batteries had long been among the most famous front-line noises.

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The enemy's plan began to disclose itself when his forces were reported to be moving upon Tiddim in a wide arc from the south. Here lay the "Black Cats," as the 17th Indian Division was known from its divisional sign. From its cocksure attitude towards all other forms of life on the front it was also known as "God Almighty's Own." These troops had been fighting the Japanese for more than two years, and were about the oldest inhabitants of the war in South-East Asia. They considered themselves, with justification, to be the masters of the enemy, and by no means rejoiced to learn that their orders were to abandon their positions and retire northward. Such, however, was the Fourteenth Army Commander's requirement for 17 Div. to fit into his plan of campaign.

It was March 12th when Cowan received his orders, and he proposed to move at dawn on the 14th. At 3 a.m. on the 13th, while lying on his camp bed, he decided to go that same day, a fortunate decision for the enemy was moving faster than Army H.Q. had appreciated. Cowan rooted out his brigadiers and told them to be ready to march at sunset. That evening the entire division moved off, leaving Tiddim in flames. They took with them 4,000 mules and 2,000 vehicles, and in the darkness many units covered 40 miles of the tricky mountain road. Cowan marched with his men. They had said that the General would never ride, and he had in fact already given instructions that motor transport would take wounded and stores. He and his staff would walk.

The orders of the 33rd Japanese Division were to destroy Cowan's troops before they could reach Imphal. It accomplished this task several times on the radio, when "only the commander and 26 men escaped to tell the tale." It is an old Japanese custom to make such boasts, and it must be added that they ardently seek to live up to them. They made unrelenting efforts to slice up 17 Div. as it moved along the trail, pushing along the flanks through the jungle in order to get ahead and throw road-blocks across the line of retreat. These road-blocks they covered with fire. Indeed, 17 Div. was under fire almost the full distance of its march, the gunners blasting open the Japanese road-blocks, and the infantry storming through them, as the wagons of the division lumbered up the valley at their heels.

The delays thus imposed on the withdrawal of 17 Div. gave the enemy further opportunity to encircle it. To deal with this, Scoones ordered 23 Div. to hold off the enemy. This placed a strain on 23 Div., which already had commitments in the Ukhrul area, and it left no reserve in the plain itself, but the task was carried out and the risk was justified. To discharge his new obligations it was necessary for Roberts to eject the Japanese forces which had dug themselves in astride the Tiddim-Imphal road, denying passage to the withdrawing British forces. Supported by light tanks of the 7th Indian Cavalry, 23 Div. attacked and drove out the raiders, enabling the march of 17 Div. towards Imphal.

Also converging on Imphal from Tamu came 20 Div. This division had stretched its fingers down to the banks of the Chindwin River, probing the land beyond. They guarded the shortest route to India, the Sitta ung-Palel road, which runs across the malaria-bed known as the Kabaw Valley.

Gracey's stick, his Labrador dog, and his love of shooting in the woods before breakfast, suggested a squire in the Old Country. He was, in fact, a squire in the jungle, and he knew every yard of his estate. To this knowledge he added a countryman's contempt for the text-book cunning of the Japanese, which all his troops shared. They had long been trained by him in jungle conditions and they, too, had measured their enemy. They were sure that they could hold him in whatever strength he sought to pass. But it was no part of the Army Commander's plan to fight in the Kabaw Valley. So Gracey had been ordered to withdraw slowly. He took his men into his confidence, explaining to them the broad picture of the campaign. Then 20 Div., like 17 Div., set off homeward to fit itself into the planned framework, determined at any rate to beat the slats out of all Japanese who got in its way. The condition of the roads was such that it had to use elephants to haul motor transport out of the mud, which it did like drawing champagne corks out of the bottle. The Frontier Force Rifles covered the right flank of the division as it drew back towards Palel, and gave the enemy a lively welcome as he came over the river. But he followed closely.

One of the Japanese objectives in this sector was Palel airfield, and they fought hard for it. Palel, which was the second of our all-weather air-strips (Imphal was the other), never fell, though both came under enemy guns.

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To reinforce besieged Imphal the 5th Indian Division, complete with food, guns,

So the march of the outpost divisions continued towards Imphal. They carried out a withdrawal which, though on a smaller scale, resembles in its masterly conduct that of Kutusov before Napoleon in 1812. That is, they fought the whole of the way and left nothing behind them but their dead. They killed at least twice the number of their own losses. Said Cowan as his troops entered Imphal after three weeks' battle in front, in rear and in flank: "We are the better troops, and every man in this division knows it. The moment we have the Jap on the move, we've got him!" Throughout their march of 167 miles the air supply squadrons had sustained them. Mail from home and newspapers were delivered to them every day. On the morrow of the casualties arriving in Imphal, they were flown out to the base hospitals in India. The effect of these arrangements on the morale of the troops was profound.

The enemy offensive was now fully unfolded along the frontier. On the eve of St. Patrick's Day, March 17th, 1944, the Japanese columns crossed the Chindwin in strength on locally built bamboo rafts at half a dozen points between Thaungdut and Homalin. They marched silently and swiftly, more lightly equipped than any soldiers who had previously set forth on such a mission. All was streamlined. Their general direction had been anticipated and at Imphal, Ukhrul, and even Kohima, which lay beyond a tangled mass of mountain jungle, Allied garrisons had been reinforced and dug in. At Ukhrul the 50th Parachute Brigade, which had been flown in as reinforcements and was fighting as infantry, inflicted heavy losses on the invaders and checked them for several days. Even so, the speed of the Japanese onset was surprising.

Five days after passing the river the Japanese army stood across the frontier of India. They had closed in upon Imphal and were gazing down from the Somra Hills into Assam. British and Indian troops engaged them and they had to fight their way forward. Fighters of 221 Group meanwhile struck hard at their bases along the Chindwin. But the flag of the Rising Sun had been raised on Indian soil for the first time. Once more Tokyo was all lit-up with victory.

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mules and ammunition, was flown up from Arakan and dropped in the heat of the battle.

In day-and-night shifts their radio celebrated, boasted, and threatened more wrath to come. Programmes were broken off while excited voices in ghastly English reeled out to Indian listeners the list of Japanese triumphs along the battle-front. This time the March on Delhi had really begun! Towards Kohima the Japanese were also driving home their punch. Slim had reckoned on them coming there, and had both reinforced the garrison and sited new defensive positions, but he neither expected them in such force nor so soon. In the town were mixed units of the Assam Rifles, Burma Regiment, Gurkhas and the Nepalese Shere Regiment, Punjabis and Mahrattas, together with pioneer, sapper, ordnance, transport, ambulance and medical units. There were about 1,500 wounded in the hospital. The covering positions at Phek, Kharasom and Jessami, which lay to the east and south-east of Kohima, were held by the Assam Regiment. Against them came a full Japanese division.

While these grave events were unfolding the Supreme Commander was lying in a military hospital on the northern front with both his eyes bandaged. Riding over the jungle battle-field near Kamaing in a jeep with Stilwell a bamboo stake had injured his left eye. He had been flown to the U.S. 20th General Hospital at Ledo, where it was doubted if they could save half his sight. On a near-by airfield, in a Dakota, stood his flying wireless and cipher station, "Mercury." A stream of signals passed into it, reporting the Japanese advance. Mount-batten got up, left the hospital and flew to Fourteenth Army Headquarters, where he conferred with Slim and Baldwin. Reinforce-ments were available, both in India and on less hard-pressed sectors; the urgent problem was to get them up in time. Mountbatten ordered 24 American air-transports off the Hump route to fly-in the 5th Indian Division from Arakan to the Kohima battle. By rail this movement would have taken four weeks. The first echelons of Brigadier Warren's 161st Indian Infantry Brigade reached Kohima in time to reinforce the garrison before all roads were cut. Mount-batten's decision was taken on his own respon-

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sibility, for the American aircraft flying on the Hump route were not under his command, but directly under that of General Arnold in Washington. General Arnold concurred in this action.

The British forward troops stubbornly resisted the enemy's advance, making him pay more than 1,000 casualties as gate-money for his entrance into India. But as his strength was realised—and the defenders di covered this through the information of their loyal friends the little Naga hillmen—it was decided to draw back all outposts and concentrate them on Kohima, and orders to this effect were dispatched to the advance garrisons. The telephones to these villages had by now been cut by infiltrating Japanese, and wireless had broken down. The orders, therefore, were entrusted to the aircraft and were safely delivered by them at Phek and Kharasom.

At Jessami, however, the troops had shifted their position during the night and the message fell in the Japanese lines. Next day a second message floated down 15 yards outside the perimeter and a struggle took place for it. The Japanese just won. Three Indian volunteers, who declared that they could reach Jessami, then set off independently. None got through. Finally Lieutenant Corlett of the Assam Regiment, who was at Phek 20 miles away, undertook to do the job. He understood very well that after he had crossed the intervening jungle and penetrated the Japanese ring he was likely to be shot by the British. For Lieutenant-Colonel W. F. Brown, O.B.E., who commanded at Jessami, had ordered that anyone moving around the camp after dark must be fired on without challenge. Corlett reached the camp and sought to crawl past the enemy in daylight, but failed. He tried again by night and succeeded, only to find the garrison gone and the Japanese in occupation. From inside their lines he reconnoitred the new British position and made a dash towards it, diving down a hillside between the opposing fronts. Both fired on him, but shouting that he was British he leapt into our foxholes and delivered his dispatch. This officer next day distinguished himself in the battle, and again at Kohima, where he was three times wounded and gained the Military Cross. The garrison at Jessami moved out safely during the night and retired northward on the main forces.

The Japanese tide swept round Kohima, and their propaganda exploited it to the limit as evidence that the Allies were in general retreat on India. Neither Slim, Giffard nor Mountbatten harboured real doubt as to the outcome. The Japanese offensive was developing substantially as expected. The enemy had banked all on a rapid ending. In claiming that Imphal had fallen by March 30th and Kohima by April 4th, it is probable that Tokyo was not ahead of High Command schedule. By these dates both towns as well as IV Corps, the main British force in Manipur, had been isolated. But against seasoned troops it is not enough to cut their line of communication. You must place yourself in a position to conduct a battle, i.e. you must be able to concentrate for a decisive stroke. The Japanese appeared to think that defeat could be inflicted on the British by moral means alone, and that surprise and encirclement could still achieve it. The experience of Arakan should have warned them, but they had learned nothing. This is to neglect your enemy, and it was one of the prime causes of Japanese failure. The result was that once again when a reserve was required to press home the attack it was lacking.

These facts were not apparent to outside observers. To an anxious Assembly in Delhi, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, speaking as Defence Member, gave reassurances of his confidence in the army defending the frontiers. Reporting on the position " as made known to me by Admiral Mountbatten, who is responsible for operations on this front," Auchinleck said: " Imphal is still in our hands and is strongly held. Penetrations by small parties of the enemy are always possible, but are not likely to be of major importance. Our commanders do not intend to let Imphal fall into enemy hands." Some believed him. Others preferred to listen to the undercurrent of opinion in the United Kingdom and the United States on the handling of this latest menace. Americans were naturally concerned over the fate of Stilwell and his forces in the Mogaung Valley. They were also wondering about Chennault in China.

So far we have described the Japanese initiative and the Allied counter-action. The reader must guard against the idea that in the general course of this campaign the Fourteenth Army Commander was conforming to the enemy's plan. On the contrary, Slim received the unwitting co-operation of the Japanese in playing his own game. He did not invite the assault across the

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frontier, but he had made the necessary preparation to receive and break it.

In Imphal Plain IV Corps, already reinforced, awaited the Japanese. Instead of a further and general withdrawal, which the exultant invaders expected, a wall of resistance rose in their path. Slim had already cropped the garrison's tail by marching out, or flying, 52,000 non-combatants and civilians. He appreciated that a man will eat more than half of his own weight within a month. The rest were brought into defensive areas. These preparations continued for several weeks before the expected date of the enemy attack. When it was delivered a dusk-to-dawn curfew was imposed.

On the supply side, Major-General Snelling had received his orders, too, and they were large. He was required to stock Imphal Plain with food, ammunition and medical supplies. The place of the evacuated non-combatants was filled with fighting men—some of the finest in South-East Asia. The Japanese had cut the land supply routes for the second time in two months. And for the second time in two months the Allied Air Force outwitted them by flying in Slim's requirements and replacements over their heads. The transportation of these troops was a secret and superbly executed operation. By the time the enemy approached Imphal it was not so much a defended base as an offensive springboard. So it proved to be.

The Japanese came near enough. They reached the crest of the hills overlooking Imphal airfield north of the town. The freshly de-planed 5 Div., reinforced with tanks, dislodged the intruders and prevented their guns from doing serious damage. The enemy threw into the struggle " every ounce of energy and talent " that he possessed, as General Mutaguchi had demanded. Not less energy and talent were expended by the garrison to frustrate this purpose. The Japanese assaults crashed like waves in a storm against the walls of Fortress Imphal, but it was the waves that broke.

As the invaders swept into the plain they were met by the cannonade of hundreds of guns, tanks, machine-guns, and the rifles and grenades of the inflexible infantry. As in Arakan, the tanks climbed up to the hillside bunkers to blast them at point-blank range. The salvoes of the artillery rolled like thunder through the valleys.

The war in the air was not less devastating. In the Battle of Imphal the Japanese brought up fighter formations for the first time for many weeks. They lasted a shorter span than they had in Arakan. 3rd Tactical Air Force swept them out of the skies, then turned both to close and remote target support for Fourteenth Army. Hurribombers became part of the pattern of the assault, strafing bunkers, foxholes and gun positions. Hurricanes spotted for the artillery and reconnoitred for the infantry. They shot up and bombed enemy concentrations, dumps, transport, bridges, river craft and locomotives. One squadron of Hurricanes specialised in picking out Japanese road transport at night by its headlamps. When the Japanese " blacked-out " and travelled by moonlight the Hurricane pilots trailed them by the shadows the vehicles threw across the road. The monsoon in no way diminished their activity. On the contrary, 3rd T.A.F. fighters and medium bombers stepped up their sorties to 24,000 in its worst four months, nearly six times the figure of the previous year's record. The tasks of the air forces of Eastern Air Command had been laid down by Major-General Stratemeyer in four words, " Strike ! Support ! Supply ! Strangle ! " Strike, to clear the enemy aircraft from the sky over the battlefield ; Support our own troops with close bombing, machine-gun and rocket ; Supply them in all weathers ; Strangle the enemy's supply, by destroying his lines of communication, his transport and his depots. This four-fold duty was fulfilled.

A unique feature of 221 Group's air defence of Imphal was that every night more than half the operating squadrons flew out of the plain to the neighbouring Surma Valley bases, where they rested, refuelled and rearmed. They flew back on guard at first light next morning. Though their day-to-day strength seldom exceeded seven squadrons, these were withdrawn and replaced several times over during the three months' siege of Imphal. Altogether, 21 squadrons took part, including three from the Indian Air Force (Nos. 1, 7 and 9). The R.A.F. squadrons were Nos. 5, 11, 20, 28, 34, 42, 60, 81, 82, 84, 110, 113, 123, 136, 152, 176, 607 and 615.

All over enemy-held Burma ranged the medium bombers of Eastern Air Command. The heavies went as far as Bangkok. In three days U.S.A.A.F. sweeps over the Japanese air bases notched 63 enemy planes on the ground. Already by the time of the Arakan battle they had closed

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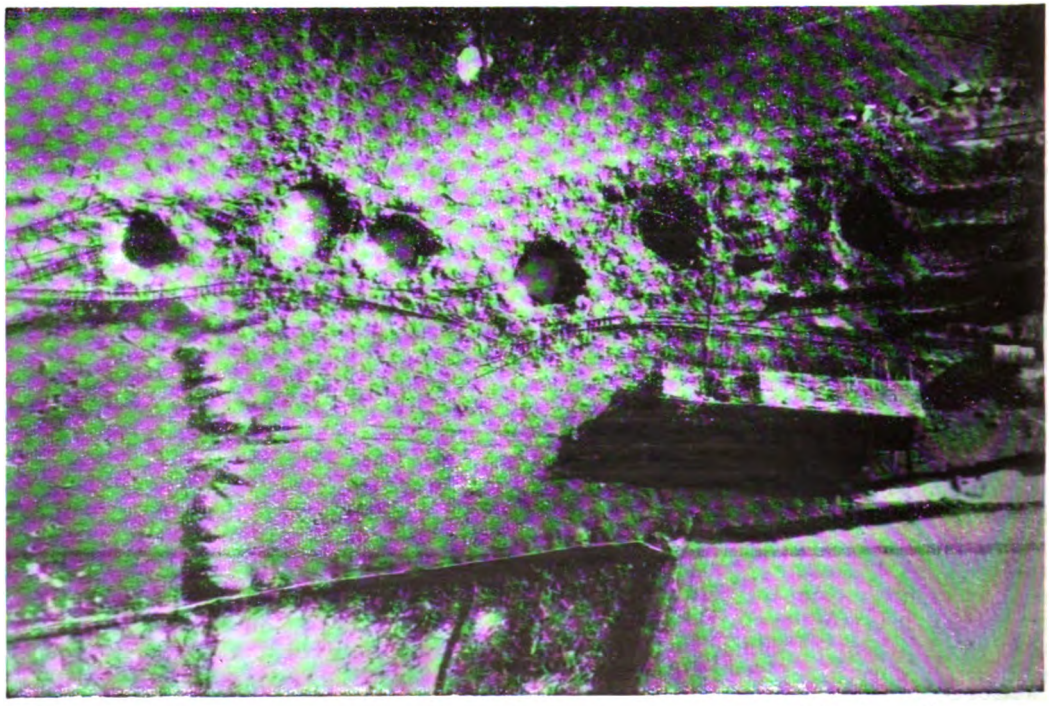
Rangoon for ocean-going supply. Now the planes swept the Irrawaddy and the Chindwin to deny the enemy his river traffic. The railway they never permitted to remain in working order. The diaries of Japanese prisoners are testimony to the horrors of rail travel in Burma. From Bangkok to Imphal was a good thousand miles, and many a Japanese soldier marched half the way to the front. "Alas! Alas!" run the diaries, "we footed it again for eleven days; the railway did not work." One thing, indeed, that the airplane could never do was to stop the Japanese soldier marching. His commanders seldom failed to bring him into battle as designed. It was the destruction of the enemy's communications which had decisive effects upon his campaign. Once he failed in his final gamble to break into India in ten days his fate was sealed, for his own supply could nowhere keep pace with his requirements. The results of this collapse of the enemy's logistics were shown later as the Allied pursuit uncovered the appalling state of the Japanese army in retreat.

While Stratemeyer's combat planes harried the Japanese, his transport aircraft poured in supplies to the Allied troops in Imphal Plain. Day after day the hungry enemy on the surrounding hills saw the stream of troop carriers bearing in food, fuel, ordnance, ammunition, stores and men. The airmen flew out 30,000 wounded, without a single loss. Thus at a blow they cut in half the sufferings of the jungle war. Three hundred planes a day unloaded at Imphal. Behind them supply units, transport men, and L. of C. troops sweated and slogged to keep the dixies and magazines filled for the men in the line. Reports flamed round the world of impending grief. The troops of IV Corps, on duty at Imphal, serenely stuck it out and never doubted what the end would be.



Full Stop. Bomb strikes on the Jap railway at Ye-u. While transports were flying in supplies to the Central Front, bombers were operating deep in the enemy's rear. Allied air power was growing.

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III. THE ROAD BACK

14. THE STAND AT KOHIMA

KOHIMA was in graver state. The Japanese had cut all roads into the town and isolated it, for there was no air-strip. The small garrison (it numbered about 3,500 against the 15,000 who besieged them) was laid under a murderous barrage from the heights above the town, which blasted every basha, bungalow and tree. The men of Kohima stood fast for 16 days and nights. They held the bridgehead to India and they understood their role, though many of them did not survive to know their glory.

To meet this threat to the Bengal-Assam railway life-line Mountbatten had summoned from the far side of India the XXXIIIrd Indian Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General Montagu Stopford, C.B., D.S.O., M.C. The concentration of this corps and its shifting across India to the scene of battle was a model of high-speed troop movement. Stopford's crack 2nd British Division (Major-General John Grover, C.B., M.C.) was undergoing intensive training at the time that the summons came, and for this purpose was dispersed in Southern India over a wide area from Poona to Bangalore. But 48 hours after he had been ordered to move his staff to Fourteenth Army Headquarters, Stopford arrived. There he learned his immediate task—to stop the Japanese penetrating the Assam valleys, to keep open the road from Dimapur to Kohima, and to prepare to drive south beyond Kohima and link with IV Corps in the Imphal Plain. By that time it was reckoned that IV Corps would have cleared Imphal and started northward to meet him.

Stopford found the following situation. By April 5th 161st Brigade had reached Dimapur from Arakan by plane, and had been at once ordered up to Kohima by the local area commander. The 4th Royal West Kents headed the march, and that is how they came to join the garrison of Kohima and play their memorable part there. A few hours after they entered the town the Japanese encircled it. The remainder of 161st Brigade was likewise surrounded and cut off a few miles down the road. When XXXIII Corps Commander took over control of operations his forces were still coming in from Arakan and India in rushes by plane and train. He covered Dimapur at once, resolving to use the rest of his troops at the earliest moment to force open the road to Kohima.

The tactical position at Kohima is described by saying that the road from Dimapur climbs tortuously up a valley to a saddle 5,000 feet high called Kohima Ridge which lies at right angles across it, as a dam would. The road turns and

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runs along the top of this ridge. Beyond, it bends away again to resume its southward direction down the valley to Imphal. Along the crest of the ridge are a number of hillocks, and rising above them on either side are commanding heights. The garrison at Kohima held all these hillocks at the start of the siege, but gradually was forced back until only one remained in its hands. The ridge is less than a mile in length.

The immediate British objectives were (i) to relieve 161st Brigade on the road to Kohima; (ii) to relieve Kohima; (iii) to drive the Japanese away from Kohima. Though only a quarter of its Signal units had arrived, with a still smaller fraction of their wireless and telephone equipment, 2 Div. advanced to the attack. It was supplied and supported by Allied aircraft which delivered ammunition almost into their gun-pits; "the prettiest thing I ever saw," said an artillery officer. It was not easy to deploy guns or tanks on either side of the valley road, for the slopes rose steeply at an angle of 45 degrees. But the Cameron Highlanders, backed by Grant tanks and mountain batteries, quickly broke through the Japanese road-blocks and linked hands with the isolated 161st Brigade.

The second phase of the battle opened—to relieve Kohima. The enemy was well dug in, and from his vantage on the higher ground was able to lay both the relieving columns and the garrison under harassing fire. He also delivered against the British posts in Kohima frontal infantry attacks that were repelled only after ferocious fighting in which Indian sappers blasted the Japanese out of the huts they had occupied. Some of the intruders hid in a brick oven and were not forced out until troops smashed open the iron doors and lobbed in grenades.

It was during this struggle that Lance-Corporal John Harman won his Victoria Cross. He commanded a forward section of the Royal West Kents. In the dark the enemy had set up a machine-gun post within 50 yards, and had begun to play upon the rest of Harman's company. Because of the nature of the ground he could not bring the fire of his own section to bear on the enemy. So Harman went forward alone, and using a four-second grenade which he held two seconds after releasing the lever, in order to get immediate effect, he flung it into the enemy position. He returned to his lines with the enemy gun. Soon after dawn, when his men again came under fire, Harman charged the enemy machine-gun nest alone with fixed bayonet. He shot four of the crew and bayoneted the fifth. As he walked back a burst of machine-gun fire hit him in the side and he fell. He said, "I got the lot, it was worth it," and died.

The garrison survived because it had such soldiers. They were now hemmed into a narrowing ring, with the enemy attacking from all points. So close did the opposing lines approach that a Japanese infantryman deepening his dugout shot a shovelful of soil into a British trench. The two sides divided the District Commissioner's garden between them. The Japanese held his bungalow, and to take it the British drove a tank up to the front door and pumped shells into it. In return the enemy artillery pounded the charred ruins of the British post.

Every dusk he indulged himself a special half-hour "hate period" of mixed gun-and-mortar barrage. As the sun sank over the far Himalayan Mountains the infantry assault was delivered. There was no moon these nights, and darkness cloaked the Japanese as they crawled forward or charged under an umbrella of grenades.

By now supplies were falling short, and the Allied pilots were called on again. Day by day they flew low over the shrinking target area through a storm of shells and bullets to drop their loads. Water was the acute need. The only supply lay within 30 yards of the Japanese lines and men had to crawl towards it singly, fill up their containers and make their way back up the bare slope, dodging the snipers' fire as best they could. The ration was a pint per day. For a fortnight the garrison had no respite, and never more than a couple of hours' sleep on end. The wounded were piling up and the resources for handling them were cruelly short.

To remedy this, Colonel Young, D.S.O., a British doctor who had passed through the Japanese lines to tend the wounded in Kohima, organised raids upon the enemy stores. With a handful of his staff and some sappers, Young brought back priceless medical supplies from a ruined hospital already in Japanese hands. Young praises the medical orderlies (they were 75 per cent. Indian) for their unfailing courage in searching the battlefield for the wounded. They could creep into No Man's Land on their mission only at dusk or dawn, and in this half-light it was hard to distinguish a stretcher party from an infiltrating patrol. Besiegers and besieged, therefore, fired impartially upon them.

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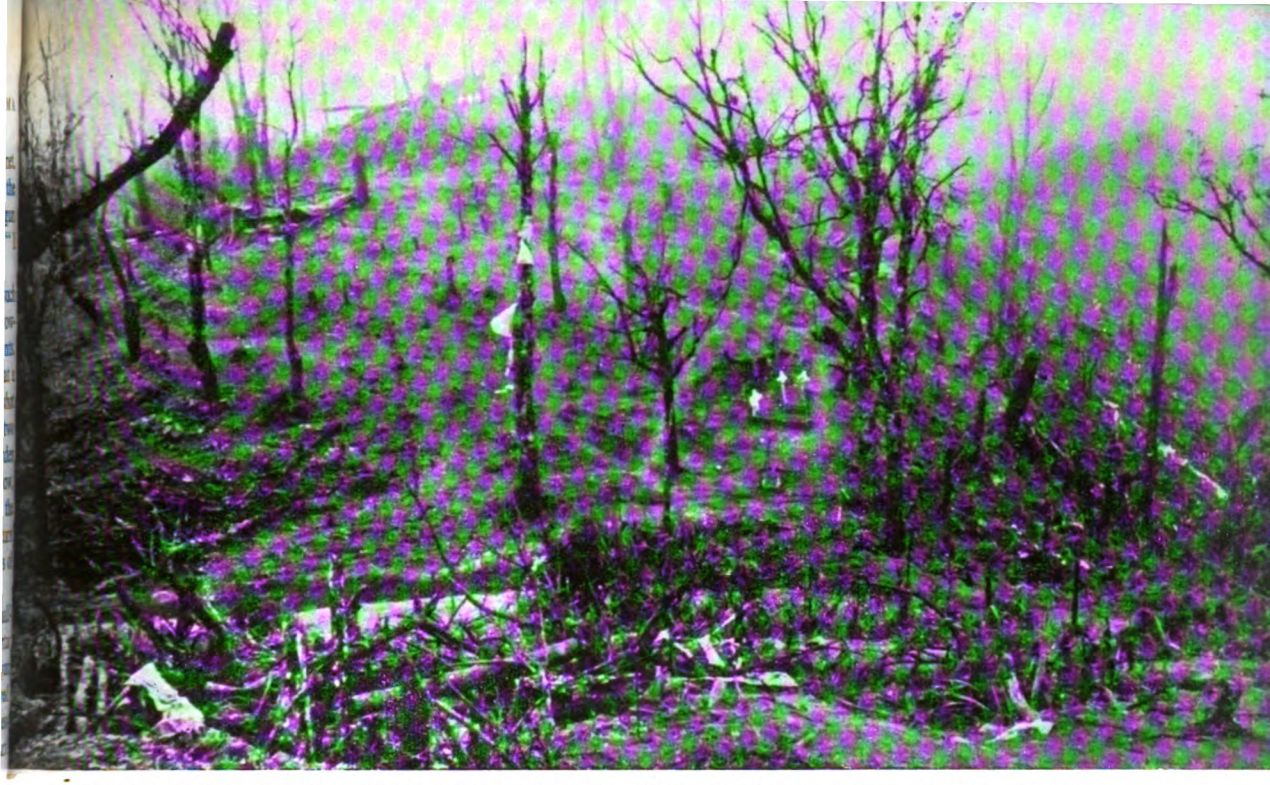

F.D.S. Hill, on Kohima Ridge, saw the most bloody fighting. These ghostly trees, shell-torn and hung with the rags of parachutes, are witnesses to the struggle. Others are the small white crosses of the garrison's dead.

But above all Young praises the wounded themselves. " They were the real heroes of Kohima Siege. No tribute is too fine for them."

They had to be laid in pits without proper cover, and under systematic enemy mortar fire. Wounded men were being re-wounded three or four times. The Advanced Dressing Station received three direct hits, two of them in the course of the same day. There were casualties each time, both among the doctors and the patients. " The shambles of that place after its second direct hit will remain always in my memory," Young said. " It was a frightful task collecting medical equipment mixed in all that blood and filth—there was a head on the floor and dismembered limbs on all sides—in order to carry on our work." Young handled close on 600 casualties during the siege. He amputated with a knife, "which at the end became rather like a hack-saw."

The garrison was gradually forced into a tiny area. It was to become famous in this bloody battle as " Summerhouse Hill." The men lay always under the bombardment of the batteries on the slopes above the town. The fighting mounted in ferocity. Five times the village of Kungpi changed hands. So costly did the defenders make daylight assault that the Japanese abandoned all the sun's hours to the guns and only put in their infantry by night. They struck at the relieving forces with equal violence, and in the darkness overran the forward positions on Terraced Hill: the Durham Light Infantry flung them out next morning. Kohima's ordeal had entered its third week before the first reinforcements could reach it, crawling in, on April 18th, by the only gully which gave access to the garrison. Then the relieving forces drove a wedge through the enemy wide enough to evacuate the most seriously wounded. Camerons and Worcesters, with tanks, artillery and engineers, broke through the Japanese roadblock and bunker positions and enabled the Red Cross trucks to go in. Though their markings showed up clearly and left no doubt as to the mission of the ambulances, the enemy kept

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This wrecked village, high on the edge of India, marks the turn of the Burma War. Isolated, badly mauled, sleepless and short of water, the small British and Indian garrison clung to this

up a stream of fire against them as the drivers picked their way along the broken road.

Next day the Royal Berkshire Regiment marched into Kohima and raised the siege. A strange scene greeted the liberators. Parachutes festooned every other tree, showing how thoroughly the air supply crews had done their supply job. Indeed, they had even carried in water in a monsoon ! The besiegers had cut the garrison's pipe-line, and there was no means of conserving the water which poured from the skies. Yet this same rain, blinding the pilots either in storm or as it hung in clouds veiling the hills, increased the difficulties of the supply-drop. Air Transport showered down waterproof sheets to serve as catchment ponds.

Not a building in Kohima was left undamaged and most were mere rubble or ashes. The dead lay unburied. Little squads of grimy and bearded riflemen stared blankly at the relieving troops ; many were too dazed to realise that they were saved, and too tired to believe their sleep-starved eyes.

The battle was far from finished. The Japanese were still in strength enough to launch a furious all-out effort to capture the town. Hurri-bombers smashed two of their assaults. A final avalanche of shells and mortar bombs burst upon the ruins and behind it came the Japanese infantry, resolutely seeking death and not being denied it. One sniper, Private Burton, shot 43 of the enemy as they tried to break out of a burning basha.

The bungalow of District Commissioner Charles Pawsey—he was one of the heroes of the siege—was among the bloodiest of the battle-fields. The lines of his tennis court separated the fighting troops. These lines could still be traced after many days of slaughter. British tanks and Japanese batteries fought one another over open sights at 100 yards. Two of the three brigade commanders who led our attack were killed, the third was wounded. A fourth, who replaced one of the killed, was wounded. John Grover, Commander of 2 Div., who had fought at the slaughterhouse of Hill 60 in Flanders, said

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battered ground for 50 days and nights until they were relieved. Their stand at Kohima stopped the Japanese march on Delhi and was the starting-point of the victorious road back into Burma.

that Kohima reminded him of " a dirty corner of the Somme, and was worse."

The enemy could not be driven out of Kohima until he had been cleared from the heights which command the town. In Naga Village, on the British left flank, he had entrenched himself. The 5th Infantry Brigade fought their way straight through this position to occupy the highest point above the village. Their advance was like the path of a ship through the sea, for the Japanese tide closed in behind them. They held on to their gains until the rest of their division swept forward to them.

The clearing of the other flank was entrusted to the 4th Brigade. Here rose the ridge known as G.P.T. (General Purposes Transport was located there), which commanded the road to Imphal. To drive the enemy off it involved marching over a jungle precipice, all supplies being carried on the heads of native porters. The brigadier reported that his men had got there and were " hanging on by their eyelids."

They had climbed there as the morning mist still trailed about the crest. It was impossible to see clearly what lay ahead, and the Commanding Officer of the Norfolks went forward to reconnoitre. Promptly the concealed Japanese machine-guns opened fire. The leading platoon went in to deal with these machine gunners and found themselves in the midst of a heavily-defended bunker system. Sergeant Bert Fitt led the charge with grenades and light machine-gun fire. When his gun jammed, he flung it in the face of the bunker crew and followed it with a grenade. The Norfolks swept the entire position clear. The commander lit his pipe and wirelessed to Brigade Headquarters, " We are here." They replied, " You haven't had the fire plan yet." But they were there.

Now with both flanks firmly held, the British commander launched his assault on the central position. This was Jail Hill. It was linked to its neighbours on either side, G.P.T. Ridge and D.I.S. Hill (Detail Issue Store). For the frontal assault Grover deployed the 161st and 33rd Brigades and the 6th Brigade which had so

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distinguished itself the previous year at Donbaik. The first attack on May 4th only partly succeeded, but four days later Jail Hill was stormed by a battalion of the Queen's Royal Regiment. They went forward at dawn under a barrage of high-explosive and smoke. The enemy stubbornly resisted. On the bare slopes the Queen's came under fire frontally and in flank. Also the covering fire of G.P.T. and D.I.S. swept their rear. They dug in and fought back from dawn until night, when two Gurkha companies came up in support. The fire duel continued all night, and next day the troops again advanced to the assault. The Japanese still stayed, and a third day and night of fighting followed before the bunker positions were captured. On Jail Hill now there stands a monument to the men of 2 Div. It says, " For your to-morrow they gave their to-day." All around lie our terraced dead.

The battle raged along the full length of Kohima Ridge and its flanking hills, and it was everywhere savage. At Hospital Spur a platoon of the Royal West Kents was reduced to four men, all wounded. We cannot here name the individual heroes of these actions, but the places where they fought and fell, Jail Hill, Garrison Hill, Church Knoll, Naga Village, Gun Spur, Aradura Spur, will be remembered whenever men of this army speak of valour.

The enemy had laid minefields over a wide area to hold up the deployment of the British tanks. But the sappers of 2 Div. cleared the main field, and from that moment the mastery of the battle passed to the British. The tanks rumbled up to the bunkers and fired at arm's length into their gun-slits. On May 14th Kohima Ridge was in British hands and all the enemy's efforts to regain it had been smashed, though the roads leading southward from it remained under fire for several more days.

The Japanese had still to be forked out of their holdings in the hills above the town. The strongest of these lay in the Naga Village area and included Church Knoll. By now the British attack had been reinforced by the 7th Indian Division, commanded by Major-General Frank Messervy, of Admin Box renown. One of his brigades (33) had taken a leading part in the storming of the Ridge. Now, under 7 Div. command, they advanced against Church Knoll. Three major assaults were required to win it, the sappers blasting the enemy out of their positions with bunker-busting pole-charges. When all artillery efforts failed to silence a particularly troublesome Japanese 75-millimetre gun a Gurkha jemadar crept forward at night with his platoon, killed all the enemy in the position (the jemadar himself got seven), blew up the gun and returned without a single casualty. Thus ended the 50-day-and-night non-stop slogging match which cost Japan 4,000 dead. British losses were not light, and included a high proportion of officers. The officer who commanded the indomitable garrison of Kohima was Colonel H. V. Richards, D.S.O.

While this costly stand-up battle was raging round Kohima, equally energetic action was going forward on the flanks. To guard against an enveloping movement from the Naga Hills and to threaten the Japs' own line of communication, the British 23rd Infantry Brigade under Brigadier L. E. C. M. Perowne had been sent out to comb the surrounding land, which has since been described as the wildest and most trackless in the Himalayas, which means in the entire world. Perowne's brigade had originally formed part of Wingate's Force. It included battalions of the Essex, Border and Duke of Wellington's regiments and the Royal Artillery. They had been organised in Long Range Penetration columns for just such work as now came to hand, and they performed it to some purpose.

The brigade was itself supplied by the unfailing air. The troops collected their rations in jungle clearings, sometimes fighting it out with the enemy for possession. With ambush, night march, and the Chindit version of the Indian rope-trick, they foxed the Japanese and took from them a ten-to-one toll in casualties. One column, with 80-lb. packs on their backs, scaled an 8,000-foot peak.

The third part of the task set to General Stopford's XXXIII Corps now fell due—to sweep the remnants of the enemy from Kohima and reopen the road to Imphal, joining hands with General Scoones's IV Corps in Imphal Plain. Stopford resolved to drive straight down the road with 2 Div., while he sent 7 Div. marching eastward into the jungle in a wide arc in the direction of Jessami to cut the enemy off from the Chindwin. Messervy had to fight his way across some of the most densely wooded country on earth. But 7 Div. now proved that it could march and fight as resolutely as it had stood and fought in the Admin Box in Arakan. Still

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Storm in the Plain. The clearing of Imphal followed the relief of Kohima. This picture shows a procession of bombs bursting across a Jap-held village. British tanks, in the distance, are waiting to move in.

farther beyond 7 Div. marched Perowne's Brigade.

Down in Imphal Plain IV Corps had also pursued their business diligently. They had need to leave nothing to chance, for the enemy pressed his attack with the utmost energy. An Order of the Day, picked up on the battlefield, expresses all his determination to make good the repeated radio boasts of Tokyo that "Imphal is Japanese." The Order also throws a curious light on the mentality of Japanese officers and men. It was signed by the Commanding General Mutaguchi and addressed to the crack 33rd Division, the conquerors of Sittang Bridge. It reads: "The coming battle will decide the success or failure of the war in Asia. Regarding death as something lighter than a feather, you soldiers must seize Imphal. You must expect that the division will be annihilated. Rewards and punishments must be given on the spot. A soldier who puts up a good show must be decorated, a man guilty of misconduct must be punished. In order to keep bright the honour of his Unit a Commander may have to use his sword as a weapon of execution, shameful though it may be to shed the blood of one's own soldiers on the battlefield and though the shirker may be worth no more than a horse's backside." Mountbatten read out this enemy Order of the Day to his own troops, with imaginable effect.

The 33rd Division, indeed, attacked with its customary ferocity. But Scoones had prepared a counter-blast equal to the moment. As the invaders left the cover of the foothills his guns and tanks poured such a flood of fire upon them that to avoid being shattered they drew back into the hillsides again, where they entrenched themselved deeply in bunkers and continued to fight. Dive-bombers, with Allied artillery and tanks, beat a ceaseless triple tattoo on these positions until the infantry closed in for the kill. The word is true, for by the end of May not one Japanese soldier remained above ground in all the 600 square miles of the Plain. The crisis of the Manipur front was past—for the Allies. For the enemy it was beginning. Stopford's triumphant divisions were about to descend from the north.

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The break-out from Kohima was impressive. Armour and infantry advanced under the smoke and fire screen of guns and mortars, dive-bombers and fighters.

Beyond Kohima, the advantage of the ground rested again with the enemy. The road to Imphal is carved out of a cliff, and to get off it you have the choice of either going up vertically or going down vertically. The mountains are immense and a brigade could be swallowed up on any one spur. The road can be commanded from a hundred positions, and discovering which of them the enemy occupied was like looking for a needle in a haystack. The difficulty of fighting across this terrain was multiplied by the arrival of the monsoon. From the end of April onward it rained hard every day, and the earth became mud. For every two steps the infantryman climbed up a hillside he slipped back one. Though the Japanese were favoured, as defenders, in this mud and monsoon element, it placed a further strain upon their not very strong supply organisation. They still got their rations, but their ammunition began to run short.

Not that resistance faded. The enemy's rear-guards conducted themselves stubbornly. At Viswema a five-days' delaying battle took place. At Maram the dash of the Worcesters captured in 36 hours a Japanese position designed to hold for ten days. Meanwhile 7 Div., having severed all enemy communications between his bases along the Chindwin River and his troops on the Imphal road, turned westward and rejoined 2 Div. The result of this double-pronged advance of Stopford's divisions was to prevent the Japanese anywhere from stabilising their front and to pile up misfortunes in their rear. Indeed, the rear of the troops resisting Stopford had already become another front, for Briggs's 5th Indian Division and Gracey's 20th were already fighting their way northward from the plain to meet the relieving forces.

The enemy was now everywhere on the defensive. His greatly reduced forces were strewn along the Imphal road, though their grip at either end of it was being broken. What would happen next? A less resolute Command might have hastened to appease the public criticism (that the Japanese still occupied Indian soil) by chasing them away as fast as possible. The British leaders had a more thorough purpose. It was to destroy these crack Japanese divisions so that the reconquest of Burma might begin.

The annihilating operation was based upon a plan agreed between the two Corps Commanders. Neither had overlooked the importance of Ukhrul, the enemy's great mountain base between the Imphal road and the Chindwin River. Already, indeed, Perowne's columns were moving upon Ukhrul's line of communication in a wide hook. But before the second large bite at the enemy could be taken the first had to be completed. At noon, June 22nd, the jaws of the Fourteenth Army snapped together on the Imphal-Kohima road when leading echelons of both Corps met at Milestone 109, a few miles north of Imphal.

From here the two Corps Commanders set in motion the second operation. Brigades of 7 Div. drove eastwards to Ukhrul, while 20 Div. units, which came under the command of General Stopford for this movement, pressed on north-eastward along the Imphal-Ukhrul axis. Perowne's columns had already closed in from north, east and south. Ukhrul's fate was sealed. The success of the annihilation plan may be gauged by the sombre record which Ukhrul still holds as the biggest burial ground for Japanese in the length and breadth of Manipur.

The forces which carried out these tasks, besides Perowne's columns, were regular brigades. The artillery units which took part were ordinary Indian Mountain regiments. Like the tanks, the mountain guns proved a success. The mule train of animals carried the 3.7-inch howitzers and ammunition over six mountain ranges averaging 7,000 feet high, and forded at least three sizeable rivers. The Japanese were astonished to receive 20-pounder shells from that height.

By mid-July the Ukhrul area was cleared. The Allied forces continued the pursuit southwards, adding considerably to the mounting Japanese casualties, and also collecting a rich haul of booty. As the British forces pressed eastwards beyond Ukhrul to the Chindwin River, main activity shifted to the southern end of the Imphal Plain. Here Roberts' 23rd Indian Division was holding mountain positions, fighting most of its time in monsoon weather which blanketed the firing line like a Scotch mist.

The third phase of the counter-offensive was meanwhile being fought out at Bishenpur, below Imphal. The Japanese High Command had regarded this sector as one of the most vital

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on the entire front and directed there some of their most experienced formations to break through at all costs. For many days and nights the killing went on with no retreat on either side. For here 17 Div. (" God Almighty's Own ") were fighting once more their ancient enemies, the Japanese 33rd Division, and, to be fair, both formations were worthy of battle with each other. In this fighting, British and Gurkha troops of 17 Div. gained three V.C.s.

But now the British had assembled a park of artillery more massive than any other so far seen in the campaign. Main target was the village of Ningthoutong Kha Khunog, where the Japanese were strongly established. The barrage stripped every leaf from the trees, chopped and scarred the timber until the wooded heights resembled the classic pictures of the grey Flanders Plain in 1918 with their mournful and mutilated stumps. When the guns ceased the infantry advanced upon the bunkers with 25-lb. pole-charges on the end of 6-foot bamboo poles.

Imphal was in fact a killing ground for Japanese in World War II as Flanders had been for Germans in World War I. It was by far the greatest battle of the jungle war, and the decisive test of the superior fighting quality of the British and Indian soldier. Though few believed it at the time, here in the " Bloody Plain " the spine of the Japanese Imperial Army in South-East Asia was broken. " They will never come back," said Slim, addressing one of his triumphant divisions. " In this year we have thrashed the Japanese soldier, man for man, and decisively. Next year we shall smash the Japanese Army."

In December drums rolled, and trumpets sang, and the flags of the Fourteenth Army flew proudly above Imphal Plain. In a corner of the battlefield before Scottish, Gurkha and Punjab regiments the Commander of the Army, General Slim, was knighted by the Viceroy, with his three Corps Commanders, Christison, Scoones and Stopford. Fifty thousand Japanese lay dead upon that field.

Welcome. The recapture of Bishenpur, south of Imphal, on August 17th, 1944, cleared the Japanese from one of their last footholds in India.

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15. MARCHING SOUTH

"THE BATTLE IS THE PAY-OFF" wrote a famous war correspondent, meaning that it was the dividend which comes at last to the bewildered recruit, learning painfully in camps the ways of war. But battle is really the something-more, the highest effort of all after the training, the slogging and the tuning-up have finished. It is the pursuit of the beaten enemy which is the pay-off.

It is one of the hardest military operations to hang on the heels of the enemy you have defeated, for he flies so fast, but it is also the most profitable. Slim confessed after Kohima and Imphal, "The advantages of pressing the beaten enemy were so immense that I called on the troops and the air forces supporting them for the impossible —and I got it."

He had already prepared his next campaign plan. It was to drive the Japanese over the frontier hills and across the Chindwin River into the plain above Mandalay, and there force battle on them before they could re-form. In this, Slim received at first the unexpected co-operation of the Japanese Commander, General Kimura. For Kimura planned to deny this dry area to his opponents until the next monsoon should break upon them; then, bogged down in the wet zone and at the end of a 400-mile jungle road supply route, Kimura reckoned that the Fourteenth Army would waste away sufficiently for him to launch his counter-offensive. Despite the Allied bombing he had built up large supply dumps for his own troops in the plain: he needed only enough time to complete his strategic dispositions. But time was a commodity Kimura was not permitted.

As Mountbatten had predicted, the Japanese did not believe that fighting could be carried on in the frontier mountains during the monsoon. They persisted in this error. The rains hindered the advance of the British guns and wagons (the enemy abandoned many of his), but it did not halt the pursuit.

As Kimura drew back his shattered divisions by the roads which they had traversed so confidently five months before, the victors followed him with unrelenting blows. The 11th East African Division (Major-General C. C. Fowkes, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.) and the Allied close support air forces hammered and harried the retreating enemy all the way back to Tamu, but the Japanese they killed were fewer than the dead they found. They passed on the roadside wrecked transport wagons in scores at a time, with skeletons sitting at the wheel. Japanese staff cars rusted there with four or five of these grim passengers apiece, and many more lay on the road with their hands behind their heads as though asleep. Their flesh had been eaten by white ants. When the Japanese 15th and 31st Divisions failed to capture Imphal they had already written their own sentence of starvation on the road back.

The formidable Japanese 33rd Division was hardly better off. It retreated towards the Chindwin by the Tiddim road, followed hard by Major-General Warren's 5th Indian Division. Allied aircraft strewed the length of the road with blasted and burned-out enemy convoys, making it a corridor of death. But even this perilous pathway home was now to be denied them. Marching across 100 miles of mountains in torrential rain, the mystery Lushai Brigade (three Indian battalions and the Chin Hills battalion) reached the Tiddim road well ahead of the retreating Japanese division. Supplied itself entirely by air-drop, it played havoc with the retreating forces, depriving them of their only serviceable road and compelling them to forsake their heavy weapons and remaining transport. Forced into the pitiless hills, hundreds more died from exhaustion and starvation. On August 19th the last organised Japanese units staggered out of India.

The condition of the enemy had everywhere deteriorated. Our aircraft and Long Range Penetration raiding columns had so disrupted his line of communication that for whole regiments supply simply ceased. Under the blows of Eastern Air Command, the Japanese fighters had long since been driven back on Rangoon, 600 miles away, and were using their forward strips merely as fuelling points. Their heavy bombers

On the Tamu Road, once a mountain track, streams of military traffic began to wind down from Manipur through the Kabaw valley, and head for the broad barrier of the Chindwin. The Fourteenth Army was on the move, marching south.

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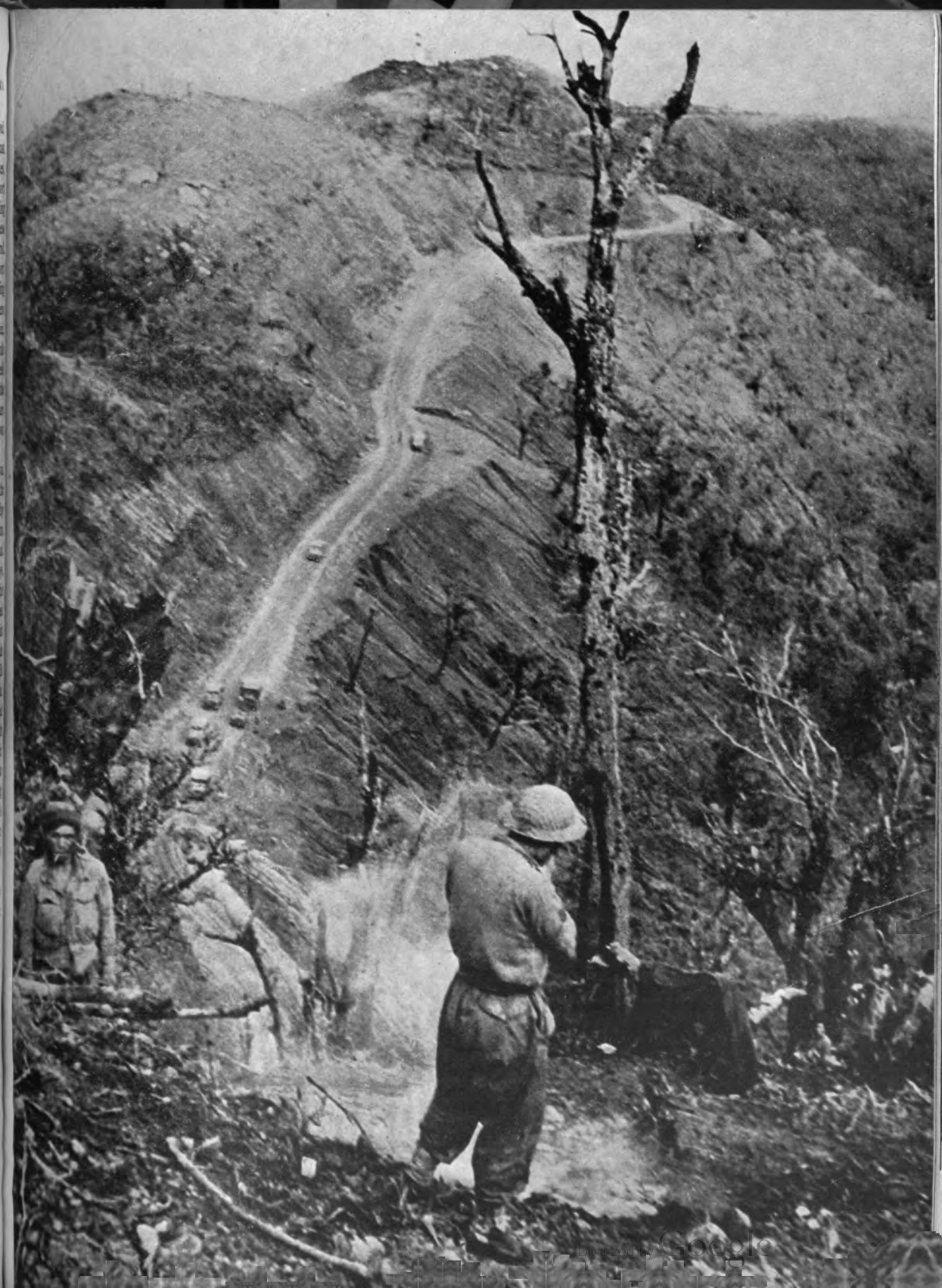

THEY POURED ACROSS THE CHINDWIN, FANNING OUT INTO THE PLAINS. TWO YEARS EARLIER

had withdrawn to Bangkok. The Allied pilots now turned the heat successively on their locomotives and rolling-stock, motor transport, river-craft, bullock-wagons—and elephants. The enemy was compelled first to fight a 20th-century war with 19th-century tools, and then deprived of those. These losses in the end were bound to affect the strongest single factor in the Japanese Army, which was the fighting will of its troops. The Japanese, that legendary soldier who was supposed to live on a handful of rice from a little ration-bag hung around his neck, began in fact to have no other ration. The effect was appalling, for even Japanese cannot live by rice alone. Fourteenth Army doctors reported that many who fell alive into our hands—desertion and surrender multiplied their number tenfold—were suffering from acute beriberi. Their body cells had lost all power to absorb water. Their skins, stretched taut as drums across the bone framework, were covered with dermatitis sores. They crawled, dying, to the feet of the giant marble and gold-leafed idols in the Buddhist temples to end life. And, ironically, many died of starvation with full ration-bags of rice around their emaciated necks—rice which they could not eat.

The Japanese abandoned their wounded (when they did not kill them), but they gave up no positions without a struggle. Suicide squads covered the retreat of their main forces, contesting every foot of the Tiddim road. Hairpin bends and narrowing ledges were mined, booby-trapped, or covered by mortar fire. The rain

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THEY WERE AN ARMY IN RETREAT ACROSS THIS RIVER. NOW THEY WERE COMING BACK.

allied itself with the enemy, causing landslides across the path of the British and sweeping away bridges with flood. Bulldozers worked in range of Japanese gunfire to clear the track, and the sappers of 5 Div. built 40 bridges in 40 miles. These bridges ranged from plank crossings to 150-foot girder spans. Beltang Lui River, which barred the approach to Tiddim, was bridged in moonlight. As 5 Div. troops advanced the rains washed out the road behind them ; they fought their way forward entirely supplied by air. With them went a handful of nurses who had volunteered for the march. The sight of these brave women, said Slim, did more to raise the morale of troops than their own victories.

Beyond Beltang Lui rises the 4,000-foot pine-covered mountain on which the outpost town of Tiddim stood, for nothing remains of it now that war has twice swept over it. Climbing towards Tiddim is the Chocolate Staircase, so named because viewed from below the short-terraced lengths as they march upward appear as a series of golden-brown steps carved out of the purple jungle. This cliffside highway was built in 1942 by several thousand Chin labourers in order to maintain a supply line to our forward troops on the Chin Hills. It was made largely by individual hands—apart from the celebrated " Chin bulldozer," which is a large board on sledges sat upon by the maximum number of the bulldozer team in order to make weight. No stretch of the road is longer than 50 yards, and it rises 2,000 feet in four miles.

From the top of Chocolate Staircase the

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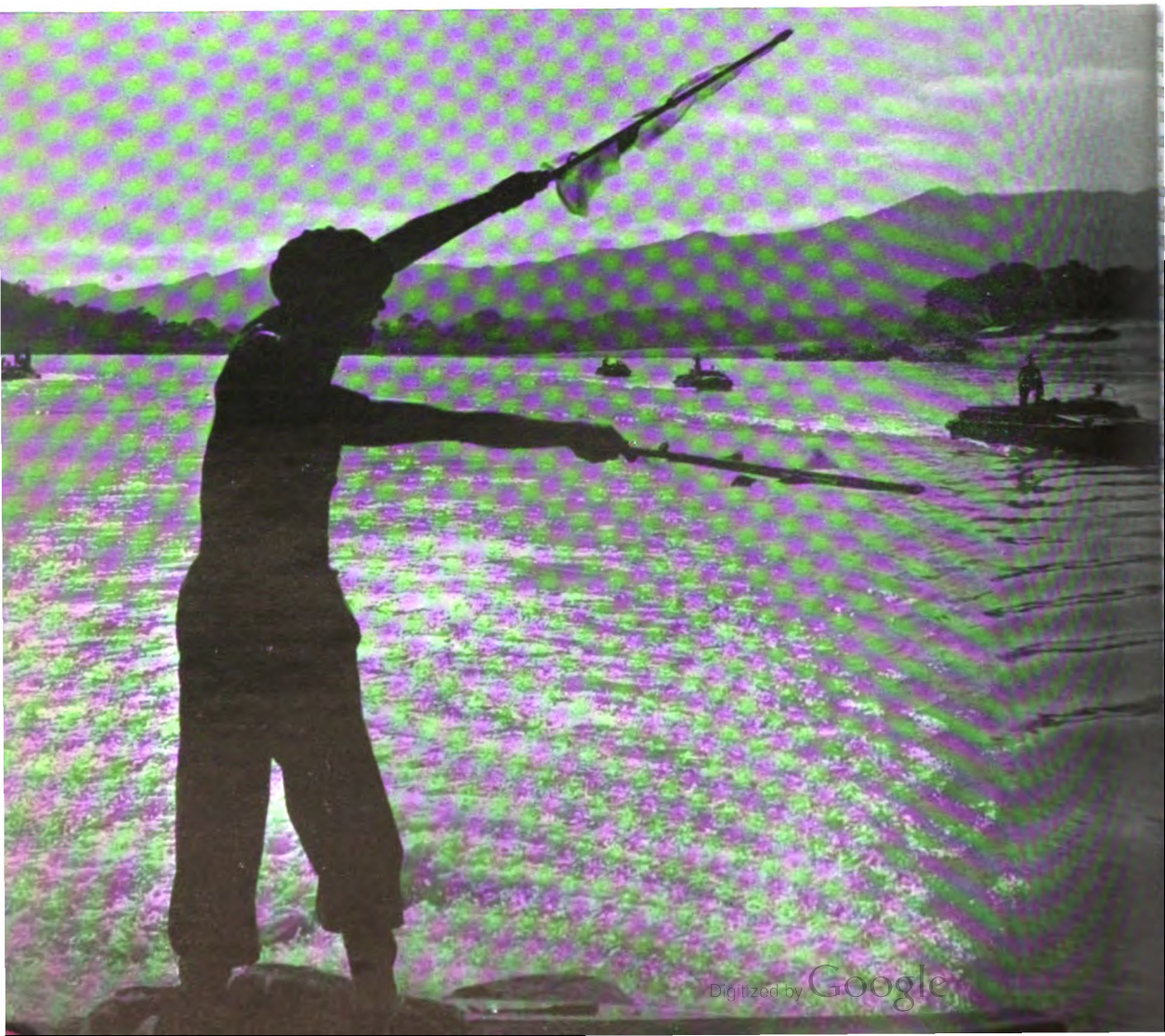
Japanese garrison watched the British coming for 20 miles along the road, stretched as a bright yellow ribbon along the blue hillside. They had not neglected to dig themselves in at the foot as well as on the crown of the Staircase. Patrols of the Dogra Regiment crossed Beltang Lui by night, located the Japanese posts and laid them under fire as the main British infantry established their front on the southern bank. Next, Punjabi troops with mountain artillery suddenly appeared on the rising ground behind Tiddim. They had crept up the crumbling cliff-tracks in a storm. The final surprise for the enemy was the tanks of the 3rd Carabineers looming out of the clouds which clung about the crest. They advanced on the bunkers with their headlamps bearing on the target. They had nosed along ledges with half a tank track over the void. Hurribombers supported the infantry assault, and Tiddim fell.

Chindwin Navy. At the Kalewa crossing D.U.K.W.s waddled down the muddy bank and set off for the Burma shore while powered ferries raced down-stream to Shwegyin, ten miles away, to cut off the retreating enemy. The river was one of the main supply routes of the offensive.



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Ahead lay Kennedy Peak and the stronghold named Fort White, which from 9,000 feet gazes down upon the mist-blanketed Kabaw, the most pestilent valley in Burma. The prospect may be dazzling from this eyrie as the sun comes up. But with him rises the fog of Kabaw, and battle becomes a struggle in a shroud. The gunners winched their pieces up into the sky, and engaged the Japanese batteries. Aircraft supplied the attackers' needs, from tank-track pins to penicillin. The fortress in the clouds was stormed, and retreat denied to the survivors by a bold detour march of the Royal West Kents and West Yorks ("The Western Brothers"), who struck down to Kalemyo, the town which lies at the southern end of the Kabaw. Here they linked hands with the East Africans, who had advanced through that Valley of Death from Tamu, driving the remnants of two Japanese divisions in front of them. From well-sited and deeply dug bunkers, which defied artillery, the enemy contested their passage. The East Africans called up air support. At one key point four squadrons of Mitchells and Hurribombers strafed the bunkers. An hour later five of the six Japanese positions were firmly in our hands. The junction of the East Africans and the 5th Indian Division came when an Askari bumped into a Sepoy one night prowling by the river side; both were hunting Japs. Soon after this convergence the East Africans forced the Kalewa defile, which leads to the Chindwin River and was the main gateway by which the Japanese had invaded India.

Already, in mid-November, the 19th Indian Division ("The Dagger Div." so called from its divisional sign), under Major-General "Pete" Rees, D.S.O., had forced a crossing of the river higher up, and was marching eastward to link up with the Allied columns pressing down into the plain from the north. No major bridgehead, however, had yet been established. This took place on the night of December 3rd at Kalewa when leading East African echelons passed over the Chindwin.

It was a symbolic and historic occasion. For it had been here, at this very place, that two and a half years earlier Slim had led the British rearguard over the frontier river in retreat. He led back the largest single army in the world.

Field Companies of the Bengal Sappers and Miners threw a pontoon bridge across the river. It was 1,100 feet long, the largest floating Bailey bridge ever erected. The parts had been made in Britain, America and India to British design, collected together at Calcutta, ferried across the Brahmaputra and transported by train to railhead at Dimapur. Here they were loaded on lorries and borne more than 300 miles farther over mountain roads to Kalewa. The floating bays were built round the corner of the Myittha River, towed by motor-boat into the Chindwin and there assembled in record time. The retreating Japanese artillery ranged on the probable site of the bridge, and when it was built Zeros flew over and tried to bomb it. They were shot down.

An astonishing armada of river-craft, ancient and modern, now appeared on the broad stream of the Chindwin. D.U.K.W.s waddled down the muddy bank and set off for the far shore, towing mules who much preferred to cross the Chindwin by Bailey bridge. Powered ferries raced downstream to Shwegyin, ten miles away, to cut off the retreating enemy. The Supreme Commander flew above the river in an L.5 plane, viewing this "Regatta Day on the Chindwin."

The East Africans pushed straight across the river and expanded the bridgehead, while the 2nd British Division, now commanded by Major-General C. G. G. Nicholson, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., passed through them and took up the pursuit. The Fourteenth Army was moving rapidly towards its selected battlefield, with two corps up (IV Corps under Lieutenant-General Frank Messervy and XXXIII under Lieutenant-General Monty Stopford). Both were accompanied by armour, which Slim hoped to use with decisive effect in the open country. All these operations were supported and supplied by air, and could not have been carried on without it. Far inside the enemy zone ranged the U.S.A.A.F. Super-Fortresses, making 1,400-mile round trips to smash the marshalling yards at Rangoon. Cannon-firing Beaufighters assailed the nearer traffic. Because of their silent approach the Japanese soldiers named them "Whispering Death." They protected their installations with ack-ack batteries and heavy machine-gun fire, but no Beaufighter ever failed to press home its attack against them.

While the Fourteenth Army was driving eastward across the Chindwin River towards the plain above Mandalay, a second Allied force was converging on that point from the north, an

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integral part of the over-all campaign plan. This was the Northern Combat Area Command of Lieutenant-General Dan I. Sultan. This Command was that which Stilwell had led to Myitkyina. It included five Chinese divisions, and instead of Merrill's Marauders there was a stronger formation known as the Mars Force (the 475th American infantry regiment, the 124th dismounted cavalry regiment, and a Chinese regiment commanded by Brigadier-General John P. Willey) and the 36th British Division (Major-General Frank Festing, D.S.O.) which had been flown in to relieve Lentaigne's Chindits. The other change, of course, was in the commander. In October 1944, Stilwell had been recalled to the United States by the President and assigned to the training of all American land forces.

He was succeeded by three men. As new Commander of the American and Chinese forces in South-East Asia Command came Lieutenant-

From the north came 36 Div., the British unit fighting under the U.S. General Sultan's command. They advanced down the Myitkyina-Mandalay railway corridor, 150 miles of shell-torn tracks, teak forests and paddy-fields. Two men of the South Wales Borderers are shown here clearing a battle-strewn street of Bahe.

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General Sultan, who had been his deputy in this role and was familiar with every problem which had faced Vinegar Joe. Lieutenant-General Albert C. Wedemeyer, who had been Deputy Chief of Staff to Mountbatten, followed Stilwell as Chief of Staff to Chiang Kai-shek, his place being taken by Major-General Horace H. Fuller. Lieutenant-General Wheeler now added to his administrative tasks in South-East Asia that of Deputy Allied Supreme Commander.

Sultan's troops were well south of Myitkyina when he took up command. As early as August 1944, 36 Div. had begun marching down the "Railway Corridor" on the main line from Mogaung to Naba Junction, near Katha. The story goes that on his arrival in the Northern Combat Area, General Festing stuck his head in Stilwell's tent and said, "Festing reporting for duty, sir. Any orders?" To which Joe replied, without looking up from his map, "Take

From the east came the Chinese who had fought their way through the racing gorges of the Salween and Shweli rivers. On January 20th, 1945, the road link with Chungking was reopened. The Chinese soldier, after ten years of war, began to see his enemy on the run.

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Taungyi!" Festing went away and took Taungyi. In fact he took a number of places along the Railway Corridor, advancing at the rate of two miles per day for the next six months. The Chinese Sixth Army (22nd and 50th Divisions), under Lieutenant-General Liao Yo Hsiang, advanced on a parallel axis. A third thrust developed on the left flank, where Lieutenant-General Sun's Chinese First Army (30th and 38th Divisions), with the Mars Force and the Kachin Levies, was advancing on Bhamo. Though at last the Allies were moving with the grain of the country instead of across it, their advance was no procession, for the enemy fought everywhere. At Pinwe, where he had fortified a strong natural position amid wooded streams, a three weeks' battle was required to shift him. The gunners poured in 3,000 shells in half an hour. Not a hut was left standing and hardly an enemy living when the Royal Scots Fusiliers entered the town on St. Andrew's Day (November 30th), with their pipes skirling "The Cock o' the North." An officer observer inquired, "Where is Pinwe?" He was answered, "You are standing on it."

The path of 36 Div. lay through tall teak-forests, swamp and flooded rivers. The Burmese peasants welcomed them with open arms, and empty hands. For the Japanese had plundered everyone and every village liberated by the Allies was found desolated. Many had long since been abandoned by their inhabitants and were overgrown with weeds and 10-foot elephant-grass. It was still the season of the monsoon and this area is among the most heavily drenched on earth. Oxen were lost in mud-holes, and mules fell asleep from exhaustion as they walked.

There was one advantage to offset these miseries. For the first time in the Burma campaign the Allies had a railway running along their axis of advance, and they made joyful use of it. As soon as they had come to the railway the American engineers fitted flanged wheels on a couple of jeeps and set them at either end of a line of trucks to pull and push a "jeep train." One of the sights on this railway was to see Festing, a six-foot-four-and-a-half-inch giant, acting as engine-driver of his own headquarters train by driving the fore jeep.

Later, two locomotives appeared that would have made George Stephenson rub his eyes. The "Windsor Castle" and the "Lancaster Castle" were built by R.E.M.E. men from salvaged Burma Railway wagons, British engines and Japanese gearboxes. However, they pulled ten loaded trucks, and downhill with a following wind they raced along at 40 miles per hour.

Festing carried his troops and equipment forward on this railway, but almost all of his supply came down to him by parachute from the U.S. 10th Air Force. Bombers of this force gave close support to the troops in assault. Chinese artillery accompanied the British infantry and took a notable part in the fierce gun battles. An American portable surgical hospital, packed on mules, was an infinite mercy.

As 36 Div. debouched from Naba Junction at the end of the Railway Corridor, they made contact, on December 16th, with troops of 19 Indian Div. who had crossed the Chindwin and pushed eastward by forced marches. Thus for the first time Slim's Fourteenth Army and Sultan's Northern Combat Area Command linked hands. Rees was as short as Festing was tall; together they were too much for the Japanese. The Irrawaddy was crossed by raft and sampan, and the advance continued southward along both banks. The Royal Sussex Regiment were the first to raise the Union Jack on the far shore. They met there troops of Sultan's Mars Force. Since they had not been blessed with any railway the passage of Mars Force had been even rougher. It advanced through a wilderness, which had been rendered more savage by the Japanese. Burnt-out villages, ruined pagodas, broken wagons, rotting equipment, rusting helmets stamped with the Japanese white dove of peace, unposted letters and unburied corpses, such were the milestones along this march. Sweating and cursing, the eternal infantryman slogged his way forward through the mud towards a ruined village with its garrison of death.

It was during this advance through the Hosi Valley that Lieutenant Jack L. Knight of the 124th Cavalry Regiment gave, in the words of his Commanding Officer, "the finest example of courage and leadership of any officer I have ever had under my command." On a Burma hillside Knight's troop ran into a nest of Japanese pillboxes and came under intense fire from mortars, machine-guns and howitzers. He had grenaded four of these pillboxes himself when he was hit full in the face by shrapnel, and blinded. Men were falling on all sides, but Knight rallied his troop and led them forward.

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He grenaded another pillbox and was hit a second time, and fell. He shouted encouragement to his men. His brother ran forward to take his place at the head of the troop, and was instantly wounded by a bullet which passed under his heart. Jack Knight crawled forward on his hands and knees towards his sixth pillbox. A rifle bullet killed him. The hill was taken, and has been renamed by the Supreme Commander's order—" Knight's Hill."

As the double drive of Slim and Sultan merged there appeared on the Burma battlefield a third Allied army, though they had long been fighting on its edge. This was the Chinese Expeditionary Force, pushing westward from Yunnan. It was led by veteran Marshal Wei-Li-Huang (" Hundred Victory Wei "), with General Hsiao-I-Hsu as his Chief of Staff; both had served during the first Burma campaign in Stilwell's command. Wei-Li-Huang's troops consisted largely of the Y Force, which was complementary to Stilwell's X Force, being trained in China by American officers instead of in India. On crossing the Burma frontier they came under South-East Asia Command. This Chinese Expeditionary Force numbered several groups of armies. Seven months' hard fighting had brought them to their present position.

On the night of May 9th/10th, 1944, Chinese patrols and engineers had first crossed the Salween River, building a bridgehead towards Burma. They represented the first offensive of the Chinese Republic against their Japanese invaders for seven years. They caught the enemy outposts asleep. The next night clouds veiled the moon and in the darkness 40,000 Chinese soldiers were ferried across the Salween River in 400 pneumatic rubber boats. The " Mad River," as the Chinese name it, flows rapidly at the bottom of a deep and steep gorge, but only one soldier was lost by drowning in the crossing. At dawn the Japanese awoke to the threat already established on the western bank and began to counter-attack with mortar and machine-gun. The following night still more Chinese troops were put across on the Japanese side of the river, developing a general pressure along the whole Salween front from Hpimaw Village, which is north of Myitkyina, to Kunlong, which is south of Bhamo.

It is not easy to describe the Salween front, except to say that it was probably the hardest in the world. On the 11,000-foot Kaolikung Mountains, which are a spur of the Himalayas there raged a battle for many months in sleet, snow and fog, in which strategic points were mountain peaks bare of every kind of vegetation. In khaki shorts and straw sandals, with no raincapes and less than a blanket per man, the Chinese infantry and gunners fought their struggle. The planes of the U.S. 10th and 14th Air Forces gave them determined but, in the nature of things, inevitably intermittent air support. In this desolate rock land large bodies of troops could not be manœuvred, and the fate of territories depended not upon divisions but battalions. The front was fluid, with harbours of resistance, and war was largely a battle between individual soldiers. " Kuli " these mountains are named. It means " Bitter Strength," and no words so well define the quality of the Chinese infantryman who fought and died there.

In Marshal Wei-Li-Huang they had a commander who had risen from the ranks and fought under fire for 30 years. In the effective use which they made of the American weapons and training which they had been given, they justified one of the most daring policies of America's great Commander-in-Chief, the late President Franklin Roosevelt. The American officers responsible for pressing forward the Yunnan campaign were Major-General A. Wedemeyer, Chief of Staff to the Generalissimo, and Brigadier-General Frank Doorn, who had built up Y Force and initiated many tactical and technical developments.

For many months the battle flowed and ebbed between the Salween and the Shweli rivers, the least reported front of all in World War II. Tengchung fell on September 21st after a 51-day siege. To the south, Lungling fell early in November. Meanwhile, Sultan's Chinese had seized Bhamo in December. At the cost of 19,000 dead the Chinese Expeditionary Force forced its way through to link with the Northern Combat Area Command, and on January 27th, 1945, the road from India via Burma to China was opened. Next day the first convoy from Ledo to Chungking rolled across the frontier. The land link to China had been rebuilt.

To Prime Minister Churchill and to the President of the United States, Mountbatten telegraphed briefly:

" The first part of the orders I received at Quebec has been carried out. The land route to China is open."

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16. THE ROAD TO MANDALAY

THE JUNGLE now lay behind the Fourteenth Army, and with it the stealthy and laborious tactics which fighting in that dark denseness had dictated. With unexpected speed Slim's soldiers adapted themselves to a war of open country and mobility.

The roads were no better than before, and the long marches continued. Leading IV Corps came Rees's 19th "Dagger Div.," which covered 140 miles in 28 days. At one point the only way that they could get round a cliff was to cantilever the track out over the abyss on beams. Meanwhile 2 Div.,which was the spearhead of XXXIII Corps, on New Year's Eve had taken by surprise the Japanese garrison which guarded the Kabo Weir, source of irrigation for the fields of half a million Burmese peasants. The enemy fought stoutly, using flame-throwers for the first time, but without avail. The two Allied divisions raced each other towards Shwebo. Parallel with this drive went Gracey's 20 Div., which had also forced its way across the Chindwin and, travelling by bullock-wagon trails, had stormed the river port of Monywa after six days' bitter struggle.

As these forces converged upon Mandalay the pattern of the Burma campaign became clear to millions of the public in Britain and America. For Slim it posed new problems. The speed and strength of his advance had caused the defences of the plain to crumble before they could be completed ; much to Slim's disappointment the Japanese decided to yield the whole area and get behind the barrier of the Irrawaddy, one of the greatest rivers in the world. Their withdrawal was covered by fighting rearguards and carried out skilfully.

Slim was still bent on bringing the main body to a stand-up battle. He had received orders not only to destroy all enemy forces around Mandalay but to seize Rangoon before the monsoon, which lay only three months ahead. These orders came from Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese, K.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., a new figure in the Burma theatre. Leese had relinquished command of the Eighth Army in November 1944, to succeed General Giffard as Commander-in-Chief 11th Army Group, as the British military forces in Burma were known. It now comprised the Fourteenth Army, XV Corps, which had recently been detached from its parent body for operational reasons, and a large L. of C. Command. In addition, Leese filled the newly created post of C.-in.-C. Allied Land Forces in South-East Asia, which included Sultan's Northern Combat Area Command. In line and in reserve Leese controlled some 20 Allied divisions.

The tasks before him were large. He had to take Mandalay with Slim's Fourteenth Army and Lashio with Sultan's N.C.A.C. ; both fronts would thus contribute to securing the line of the Burma Road. To take Rangoon a third front had to be expanded and pressed forward.

This was in Arakan, where Lieutenant-General Christison's XV Corps had been gradually pushing down the Mayu Peninsula ever since the main battle had shifted to Manipur the previous year. Leese's instructions now were to capture the large coastal islands of Akyab and Ramree by seaborne landings, and secure the airfields there from which the Fourteenth Army could be supplied by air as it advanced down the central Burma valleys upon Rangoon. To launch these amphibious operations Admiral Sir Arthur Power, K.C.B., C.V.O., Commander-in-Chief East Indies Station, had collected all available landing craft. Those assigned from Europe were still only beginning to come out and the force started as a very mixed party.

Mountbatten had made his over-all plan of campaign to capture Rangoon on the basis of considerable reinforcement. At the second Quebec Conference in September 1944, the Combined Chiefs of Staff, reporting to the President and the Prime Minister, had endorsed his estimate that a further six divisions, together with a large amphibious fleet, would be required. The winter counter-offensive of Field-Marshal von Runstedt in the Ardennes deranged these plans. A second blow fell when a sudden Japanese advance in China threatened Kunming, terminal airport of the Hump route. The Chiefs of Staff ordered back to China two of Sultan's Chinese divisions and three American Air Supply Squadrons (75 Dakotas). Though the withdrawal of these troops checked Sultan's advance

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Before the Citadel. On March 8th the famous " Dagger " Division fought its way into Mandalay, and the enemy withdrew to Fort Dufferin in the heart of the city. It was a formidable stronghold, with sides one and a quarter miles long, a 30-foot rampart, and a moat 70 yards wide. Half-naked gunners, with a 5.5 mm. gun, are here firing point-blank at the fort. It fell after twelve days.

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They attacked from bridgeheads on the Irrawaddy. They came at Mandalay from north and west and south, driving

They advanced into the city across the smoking mouths of shattered foxholes, across the charred bodies of the dea

They raced, with armoured spearheads, south. Meiktila, key Jap base, with its eight airfields, had been seized by

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ong roads of wrecked dumps and blazing villages.

er walls breached and blasted by their shellfire.

sudden, secret thrust. The front lay wide open.

and released enemy forces for concentration against Slim, its effect was far less serious than the loss of so much vital aircraft. It was not only supply that suffered; tactical mobility, which is the power to outflank, by-pass or isolate enemy resistance, was much impaired and the tempo of the entire offensive slowed down. Mountbatten dispatched to London his Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General F. A. M. Browning, C.B., D.S.O., who had come from commanding the Airborne Corps to relieve Sir Henry Pownall on his being invalided out of the Command. Browning not only succeeded in obtaining promises of replacements from British sources for the lost American aircraft, but got an increase. Meanwhile South-East Asia Command was committed to carry on with existing resources, or else abandon its designs. Mountbatten drove ahead. A series of seaborne landings and hooks forced the enemy into retreat down the Arakan coast, and the Fourteenth Army closed in rapidly towards the great loop of the Irrawaddy.

As early as Christmas Slim had ordered his Corps Commanders to prepare to cross the river. At that time he had rather less than five divisions available for the operation, and the enemy had rather more than five with which to contest it. Slim had been willing to accept the numerical odds, relying on the better quality of his troops, his armour and his overwhelming air support. But towards the end of February Marshal Chiang Kai-shek halted the southward march of his Chinese divisions. This, combined with the withdrawal of the enemy behind the Irrawaddy and the masterly concentration by night of his forces which General Kimura effected behind the screen of the river, now gave the Japanese a total strength of eight divisions.

Frontal assault across this water barrier, two miles wide and dotted with treacherous sandbanks where it flowed through the flat lands, with steep banks where it channelled through the gorges, was a risk Slim was not prepared to take. He resolved to strike against the Japanese rear. To do this he switched IV Corps from the northern flank of his army, above Mandalay, and prepared to launch it in a surprise thrust across the Irrawaddy near Pakokku, 100 miles south of the city. From there he proposed to rush on Meiktila, the nodal point of road, rail and air communications below Mandalay, and containing the main dumps and installations of the enemy. The main Japanese army in

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Central Burma would thus be caught between the anvil of IV Corps and the hammer of XXXIII Corps descending from the north at the moment that its nerve-centre was destroyed.

The plan was daring, for it involved the secret march of IV Corps across the rear of XXXIII Corps for 300 miles, with a major operation at the end. To move two divisions and a tank brigade by the narrow dirt roads was an outstanding feat of logistics, the more so since Slim had lately lost the services of so much air transport. To supplement his tenuous road supply, already 400 miles distant from railhead at Dimapur, the Fourteenth Army Commander turned to the resources at hand. These were the Chindwin River and the timber that grew upon its banks. The sappers became lumberjacks and shipwrights, and soon they were turning out hundreds of boats. " They were not graceful craft," confessed Slim, " but they floated, and they carried ten tons apiece." Outboard engines and even tugs in sections were flown in from Calcutta and assembled on the river bank. Two naval gunboats, mounting Bofors and Oerlikon guns, were built and launched to patrol the river, probably the first time that the Army has constructed warships for the Royal Navy. By one means or another the river route was established and IV Corps, with its necessary supplies, assembled in the assault area on time. The move was masked by elaborate deception, including the setting up of a fake Corps H.Q. north of Mandalay and passing wireless signals through it.

The march of the real IV Corps was headed by the 28th East African Brigade. This was a separate Brigade of East Africans, independent of the 11th East African Division, which had led the advance of XXXIII Corps through the Kabaw Valley. By employing them now below Mandalay Slim hoped to deceive the enemy into believing that he was fighting XXXIII Corps here also, and that IV Corps was still operating away to the northward.

The ruse succeeded. The Japanese massed against the British above the city, bringing up a concentration of over 60 guns. Slim moved 7 Div. up to Pakokku, which was a Japanese stronghold on the west bank of the Irrawaddy. The Commander of 7 Div. (now Major-General G. C. Evans, defender of the " Admin Box " in Arakan and three times a D.S.O.) feinted against Pakokku and threw his troops across at Nyaungu, ten miles south. The crossing, made at dawn on February 14th, 1945, without preliminary bombardment or air-strike, was covered by R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. fighter-bombers. Some of the outboard motors, damaged by their thousand-mile journey along jungle tracks, broke down, and their boats were borne by the swift current helplessly past the Japanese machine-gun posts. Others reached the far shore and, in the face of fire, the infantry scaled the cliffs. They blasted the enemy out of the deep catacombs in which he had entrenched himself, and pushing beyond, erected a bridgehead.

The Japanese did not react to this move, and appear to have regarded it as a diversion. They were preoccupied with 19 Div., which had crossed the Irrawaddy on the night of January 14th and established themselves near Singu, 40 miles above Mandalay. For the next month Kimura devoted his main effort to destroying this bridgehead by artillery and infantry assault, but Rees withstood all blows and gradually enlarged his holding. Below Mandalay on February 11th Gracey's 20 Div. had also made a crossing. Again the enemy was stung into launching violent though unavailing counter-attacks for 14 successive days and nights. He was finally convinced that the main attack was going in against Mandalay.

The scene was now set for battle. Slim had three divisions across the river, two of them (19 and 20) poised against Mandalay from north and west; the third (7 Div.) was a spring-board for the jump towards Meiktila. Awaiting the order to follow it were two more (5th and 17th Indian Divisions) which he had entirely motorised or made airborne. They were to strike the mortal blow at the Japanese rear. A sixth division (the 2nd British) was waiting to cross at Sagaing, below Mandalay. On February 19th Slim unleashed the storm.

North of Mandalay the " Dagger Div." broke suddenly out from its bridgehead at Singu and surged southward. By March 7th Rees was hammering at the gates of Mandalay. He seized Mandalay Hill by a night climb and dawn assault. But though he now gazed down on the golden-gleaming pagodas of the City of the Kings he had to fight every step of his way in, across the shrines which stud Mandalay Hill. Rees had forborne to bomb the sacred places, but Allied aircraft flew round and round the crest pouring machine-gun fire upon the garrison. Some of

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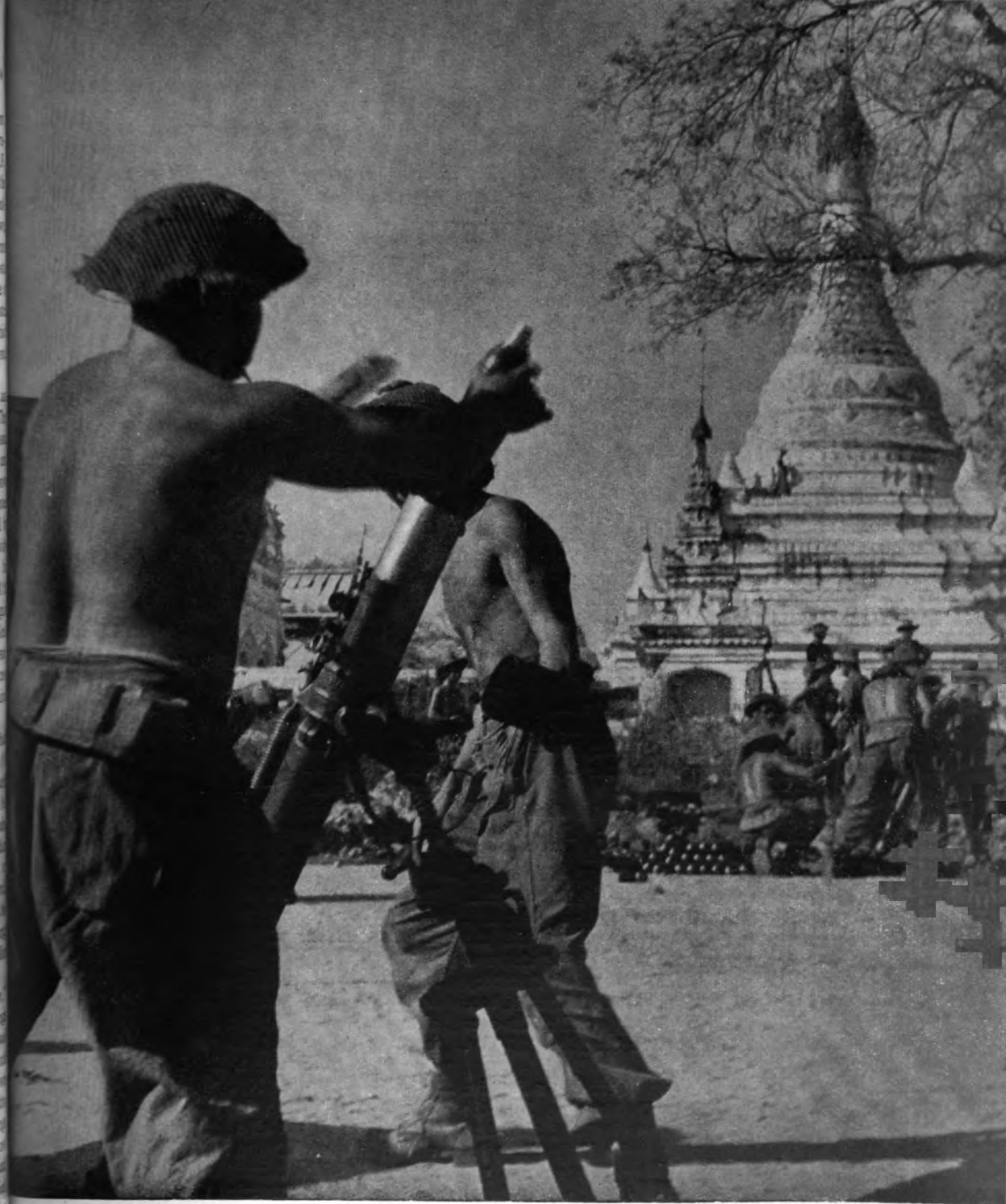

In Meiktila mortars were firing beneath the white and gold pyramids of the pagodas, as Fourteenth Army troops, flown in by air, advanced to clean up the town. The fall of Meiktila, 80 miles south of Mandalay, spelt the doom of that city.

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these barricaded themselves in a tunnel underneath the great Reception Hall. They were burnt out by rolling petrol drums into the tunnel and flinging grenades after them.

The Gurkhas and Royal Berkshires gradually cleared the hill, though the enemy snipers had a field day amid its forest of pagodas. Rees, directing the battle from a terrace and wearing his conspicuous red scarf, had his orderly shot dead as he spoke to him. He pressed the attack with energy against the town and Fort Dufferin, the mile-square, red-walled palace which now lay at his feet. Pondering how to seize it, he recalled how once, as a young officer attached to the Governor of Burma's staff, he had explored a culvert which burrowed beneath the walls of the fort and the moat itself. He sent a party of sappers to make a reconnaissance. By night they waded thigh-deep through the slime and water into the enemy camp. Had the Japanese fought a few days longer, Rees might have captured Fort Dufferin from beneath.

Mandalay fell otherwise. Battling up from the west came 20 Div. and 2 Div., each fiercely seeking the honour of leading Stopford's Corps into the City of the Kings. The crossing of the Irrawaddy by 2 Div. on the night of February 24th had been contested. The Japanese held their fire until the boats were in mid-stream; the full moon lit up their target and they made deadly play upon it. Nevertheless the crossing was forced at two points.

Meanwhile Rees's guns pounded the 30-foot-thick walls of Fort Dufferin; the masonry crumbled, but the massive earth embankment behind it swallowed the shells. Then suddenly, after a determined defence, the Japanese retreated and an Anglo-Burman ran out with a white flag. When 2 Div. and 20 Div. linked up with the Dagger Div. on March 21st, the citadel was already British. In a few days of desultory fighting, Mandalay was cleared. Maymyo, too, had fallen. Marching three days and nights over an opium smugglers' trail, a brigade of 19 Div. had seized it.

South of the loop of the Irrawaddy, a decisive battle had been fought. On February 20th the reward had come to the motorised and armoured troops of 17 Div., long greasing their axle hubs, renewing tank tracks, and tuning engines and weapons. Passing through 7 Div.'s bridgehead, and fighting their way across the broad chaung, which covered the approach to their objective, 17 Div. smashed straight across the enemy lines to the Meiktila airfields, 85 miles away, which it reached in as many hours. The Japanese Army was cut in two.

Not that the enemy accepted his fate. He rushed up all the artillery he could muster to recover the lost nerve-centre of his army. Troops moving towards Mandalay were put in reverse, and even some already engaging XXXIII Corps were pulled out. Time and again Major-General Kasuya, the energetic commander at Meiktila, flung in his picked infantry, heavily armed with automatic weapons, to regain the airfields; to hold the town he ordered every hospital patient who could fire a rifle to fight until killed. They faithfully obeyed this order. The British and Indian infantry shot, bombed, burned and hacked their way into the strong-posts and barricaded alleys; the remnant of the garrison crouched in the cellars, and still fought. They were bayoneted to the last man. Whatever else they were, these Japanese earned Slim's hard tribute as "the most formidable fighting insects on earth."

Kimura was not yet done. He attacked the Nyaungyu bridgehead, intending to isolate the British on the eastern side of the river. He could not contest the air route, and Allied transport planes, flying twelve hours a day, continued to land on the airfields and unload supplies and men even while the Japanese artillery ranged on aircraft already on the strip. The fly-in of 5 Div.'s airborne division decided the fate of Meiktila, and from it the tanks drove out to shatter the enemy concentrations as he formed them. The armoured formations which seized Meiktila were Probyn's Horse, the 9th Royal Deccan Horse, the 4th Bombay Grenadiers and 116th (Gordon Highlanders) R.A.C.

As IV Corps established its grip on Meiktila XXXIII Corps broke from its bridgeheads below Mandalay and stormed southward. Stopford accepted risks. At Myingyan, for example, intact and powerful garrisons menaced his flank. To destroy this threat, Evans's 7 Div. swung northward from its Nyaungyu crossing, and in twenty days' battle, in which two V.C.s were gained, wiped out all resistance. A steel wall moved in upon Kimura's army.

The two Indian Armoured Brigades (254th and 255th), who accompanied the advance of Fourteenth Army and became its spearhead, were equal to the enemy in valour, and superior in

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skill. Leese reports of them " they fought magnificently ; and their gunnery, driving and maintenance were first class."

As the last solid resistance groups melted, strange things happened. A British tank commander, approaching a haystack, thought he detected an anti-tank gun dug in at its foot. He ordered his machine-gun to fire into it. The " stack " caught fire. Inside it was a Japanese medium tank. The battle of the pockets gradually diminished. From final annihilation the enemy escaped only by sacrificing his guns, wagons and stores. The Battle of the Plain was over.

During these operations, from January until the end of March, more than a quarter of a million tons of stores and weapons were carried forward by the transport aircraft of the Eastern Air Command and laid at the feet of the marching armies. Planes did the work of trains, trucks, ships and pack-mules, hauling forward everything from needles to cranes and bulldozers. Thus the final design for victory in Burma was forged.

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17. WAR IN THE CHAUNGS

ARAKAN is a corridor that leads nowhere. For beyond Akyab the Arakan Yoma, which is the main range of the country, sweeps in towards the coast until only a strip of land is left between the mountains and the sea. A couple of jungle tracks lead across this barrier to the Irrawaddy ; one is the An Pass, and still further down the coast there is a fair motor road from Taungup to Prome. This is the sum of Arakan's communications with the central plain of Burma.

For the Japanese, Arakan had a nuisance value ; from its airfields they had been able to threaten Calcutta, and twice to bomb it. To some extent they interfered with Allied shipping in the Bay of Bengal. For the British, the possession of these airfields would bring enemy-held Rangoon within equivalent flying range. As we have seen, they had a larger design : they meant to make Arakan the supply base for the invasion and capture of the great port itself.

Air supply had by this time so far developed that it was sustaining an entire army in the field for months on end, and while in continuous movement. Two thousand tons a day, 60,000 tons per month, this was the average air lift as the Allied armies advanced from India into Burma. On the peak day close on 4,000 tons of stores and ammunition were delivered. The best month (March 1945) recorded 78,250 tons, as well as nearly 27,000 military passengers carried, the greatest supply achievement in the history of the air.

There is an almost arithmetically-determined " economic radius " in which supply aircraft can operate ; at present, this is about 250 miles. When Fourteenth Army had advanced to Mandalay it had reached this limit. Meiktila, which lies 80 miles beyond, could be supplied from Chittagong, but no longer economically from Imphal. To keep Fourteenth Army rolling forward on Rangoon it was imperative to advance in Arakan and secure the airfields. This was the prime " object of the exercise " in the last Arakan campaign : it was completely achieved.

The available forces were Lieutenant-General Christison's XV Corps, which comprised two Indian and two West African divisions, plus the East African 22nd Brigade and the 50th Tank Brigade ; they were supported by Air Commodore the Earl of Bandon's 224 R.A.F. Group. Rear-Admiral B. C. S. Martin, C.B.E., D.S.O., was Flag Officer Commanding Force W, which constituted the sea arm.

In the Maungdaw-Buthidaung Tunnels area and the deep fastnesses of the Kaladan Valley Christison concentrated his troops towards the end of 1944. It was December 10th when he set them moving on this third and last Arakan campaign. The 25th Indian Division (Major-General G. N. Wood, O.B.E., M.C.) advanced astride the Mayu Range. On its left the 82nd West African Division (Major-General H. C. Stockwell, D.S.O.) reoccupied Buthidaung, and moved down the east bank of the Mayu River. The veterans of the Kaladan Valley, the 81st West African Division (Major-General Loftus-Tottenham, D.S.O.), once more formed the far flank guard, marching southward again in their old familiar tracks. Though only 60 miles distance from the coast, shut off by 2,000-foot mountains and the barrier of solid bamboo forests, they might have been (but for air trans-

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Forward from Arakan. While the offensive developed in the north XV Indian Corps struck down the coast from Arakan to seize spring-boards for the attack on Rangoon. This broken country, netted with small rivers and islands, was crawling with Japanese defenders. They were attacked by air, sea and land. *Above*, bombs falling on Myebon Peninsula. *Left*, invasion craft approaching Ramree Island, and *below*, Chaung bridgehead established.

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port would have been) in another world. With shovel and machete the " Black Tarantulas " built seven Dakota airfields and a dozen fighter strips, and remained in touch with this world.

The Japanese could not withstand the pressure of these forces though they did their utmost, calling forward first one and then a second of the three battalions which garrisoned Akyab. They were severely mauled as XV Corps pushed on. By Christmas Day, 1944, 25 Div. were at Foul Point, on the tip of the Mayu Peninsula, and looking across at Akyab Island. The West Africans were pushing eastward to harass the Japanese retreat along the coast. By seizing the ferry at Kyauktaw across the Kaladan they compelled the enemy to carry out long flank marches to resume his withdrawal.

The next phase of the Supreme Commander's plan had been for Christison's troops to invade Akyab from the south by seaborne landing while a second assault was launched from the north. But the enemy's calls for reinforcements in the Mayu fighting had so drained his Akyab garrison strength that he could no longer hope to hold the island. To remain and fight it out would have been to throw his third and last battalion away after the other two. The Japanese chose to evacuate Akyab. When Christison, without waiting to mount an attack from the south, ferried 25 Div. across the Mayu estuary to seize the island on January 3rd, 1945, he found the defences deserted. The Battle of Akyab had been won on the Mayu Range.

The first vital airfield had been secured ; the following operation, launched against Myebon on the mainland 30 miles south-east of Akyab, was designed to cut the road by which the Japanese were still withdrawing down the coast from the Kaladan Valley. After a shattering air bombardment by Thunderbolts and Beaufighters and backed by the guns of the sloops *Narbada* and *Jumna*, the 3rd Commando Brigade waded ashore and advanced across beaches that were mined, and defended by 75-mm. artillery and machine-guns. The Japanese reacted sharply to the threat against their communications, and very soon they had built up their resistance. The Commando troops comprised the 1st and 5th Army Commandos and the 42nd and 44th Royal Marine Commandos, and were led by Brigadier Campbell Hardy, D.S.O., R.M. With the 74th Indian Infantry Brigade, which relieved them, they had to fight their way forward to the road. They found themselves in a labyrinth of mangrove swamps, intersected by tidal chaungs.

The channels through these chaungs were narrow and often treacherous ; they had been explored and charted by Combined Operations Pilotage Parties (C.O.P.P.). This work involved stealing up the chaungs by canoe in the night or in the mist of early morning to sound for depth, and marking the channel with buoys ; it meant climbing ashore at low tide up the slimy banks to reconnoitre beyond them the prospect of assault across the firm (or flooded) paddy-fields ; finally, on D-Day, the C.O.P.P.s guided the invasion convoys in by pilot boat or by paper " signposts " affixed to the overhanging branches. At any bend or confluence the chaung might be mined or ambushed. Indeed, the whole distance of this jungle water-maze was a sniper's paradise. The C.O.P.P.s took the chances—and the enemy failed to exploit them.

From the British side risks were an integral part of the game. After meticulous and many-sided plans for operations along the Arakan coast had been sealed the speed of Fourteenth Army's advance in Burma presented new time-tables to the planning staffs. To press ahead at all costs became the proper and the prudent course. Christison never ceased to urge it.

The men on the spot equally appreciated the need for speed. " Gentlemen, let us make our plans standing up," proposed Captain Duncan Hill, R.N., the Naval Force Commander, and thenceforth they did. Operations were designed and cast within 72 hours of the attack, and in a territory imperfectly mapped and charted. In winding creeks, hardly negotiable by landing craft, you would come across the sloops, lashed bow and stern to mangroves to steady their aim, with all guns firing a broadside in support of an infantry assault 200 yards away. The muddy bankhead, by which the troops were supplied, seldom exceeded 30 yards in width. The sailors managed to put ashore not only infantry and 25-pounder guns, but bulldozers and the 17th Lancers' Sherman tanks. They got the army's food up to it for three months, and brought its wounded home.

Against the British drive to cut off his retreat the enemy launched a series of suicidal counter-attacks. At Kangaw village, which commanded the coastal road, was fought one of the fiercest battles of the Burma campaign. The Commandos landed on a chaung mud-bank and approached

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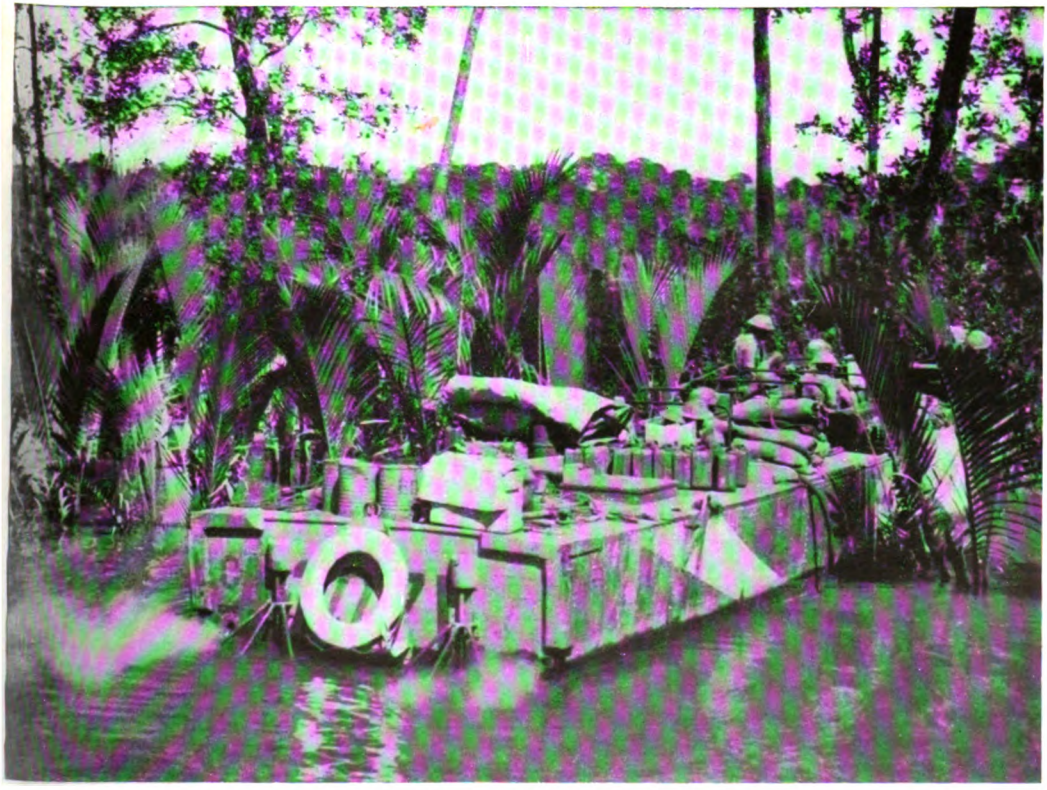
the village across a tidal swamp, so densely covered with spikes of mangrove root that a foot could not be placed between them. In their path rose a narrow wooded ridge known as Hill 170, which was stoutly defended. It took two days' hand-to-hand fighting to push the enemy off Hill 170, and then he laid it under artillery fire. While this struggle continued the 51st Indian Infantry Brigade pushed round the rear of Kangaw.

At dawn on January 31st the Japanese launched their counter-attack on Hill 170. Following a bombardment 90 screaming Japanese sappers, carrying explosives, charged the north end of the ridge. Most of them fell, but the survivors who struggled through knocked out a couple of British tanks; their infantry then attacked *en masse*, and were as savagely counter-attacked by the Commandos. All day long the two sides were at grenade range, their dead interlocked. It was here that Lieutenant G. A. Knowland of the Royal Norfolk Regiment won his V.C.; he was killed while firing a two-inch mortar from the hip point-blank into the advancing enemy. Next day were counted 340 dead Japanese on a patch of ground 100 yards square.

Towards evening the enemy's frenzy died down, and as his main body drew off Thunderbolts made a heavy strike. But parties of Japanese dug themselves in along the edge of the British positions and fought all night. They were cleared by the 2nd Punjabs, who went forward at dawn and blew up every foxhole with grenades. But the Japanese had not neglected to construct further elaborate defences in readiness for the British attack. It required four weeks' hard "bunker-busting" to force the Kangaw Line.

The 82nd West Africans and part of the 22nd East African Brigade were now approaching



The Chaung War was a strange amphibious operation waged up in the jungle rivers. Here gunboats and landing-craft hunted down Japanese remnants hiding among the maze of tidal creeks and mangrove swamps.

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from the north and the main Japanese forces appeared fated for annihilation. But the enemy's sacrifices (he lost 2,000 killed at Kangaw) had not been vain. While the battle raged he had built a loop road, and he now pulled out along it and continued his retreat southward. He was making for the district of An, where he had reinforcements if he wished to stand, and an escape route over the An Pass if he wished to bolt. Corps Commander Christison resolved to make another attempt to cut the Japanese off before they could reach An, which lies about 20 miles inland and beyond a mountain. The place he chose for this new landing was Ruywa, which is on its nearest shore.

It was the best that could be done in the circumstances, though Ruywa is far from providing an ideal bankhead. It is screened from the open sea by a deep belt of mangrove swamp and chaungs, and as usual its approaches were uncharted. Nevertheless, the operation was laid on within three days, and achieved tactical surprise. Not only was the landing unopposed, but it was unobserved. On the evening of D-Day a truck-load of Japanese soldiers drove up to the village of Ruywa and stepped out in the midst of 4,000 British troops. By the next day the news was out, and the Japanese guns and mortars began to range on the bankhead; in the end they made it so hot that it could only be used after dark. The Navy continued to operate their 50-mile chaung line of communication. They safely delivered ashore nearly 18,000 troops, 14,500 tons of stores, 523 mules and 415 vehicles. It was done with badly worn craft. During this period motor-launch and minor landing-craft crews carried out deception raids, provided a wide flank guard on either side, and engaged and sank scores of Japanese vessels. Though the landed brigades did not succeed in trapping the main Japanese forces on the road to An, they inflicted further losses on them in casualties and equipment. Under these successive blows the Japanese army in Arakan began to break up.

Besides the Royal Navy, units of the Royal Indian Navy, Royal Canadian Navy and South African Naval Forces took part in this amphibious campaign. Captain Duncan Hill, R.N., who was in charge as Commander, Naval Force 64, was awarded the D.S.O. for his outstanding leadership. The chaung campaign added an exciting chapter to the story of Combined Operations, and taught useful lessons.

Of the operations reviewed, Admiral Power, C.-in-C. East Indies Fleet, reported "they afforded opportunities for enterprise, resource, impromptu action and close-range fighting. On each occasion the enemy was caught on the wrong foot and defeated. Sloops, destroyers, minesweepers, motor launches, and landing craft manned by naval personnel landed and supported our troops without any fuss, navigated uncharted waters with skill, and although in face of considerable hardships they never flagged."

While this "inland waterways war" was going forward the East Indies Fleet had mounted a considerable seaward operation, the invasion of Ramree Island. It is a much larger place than Akyab Island, and more suitable for airfield development; as it turned out it was also a more difficult place to take. The Japanese garrison numbered about 1,000 men, and though they did not intend to defend their position to the last, they fought for many days with determination. The Japanese also sent over aircraft from the mainland to bomb our blockading ships, though these attacks proved abortive because of Allied air superiority.

The troops assigned to the invasion of Ramree Island were the 26th Indian Division (Major-General C. E. N. Lomax, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.). They were to be landed under the cover of the Fleet guns, and for this purpose the battleship *Queen Elizabeth* was employed, accompanied by the cruiser *Phœbe*, the destroyers *Napier*, *Pathfinder* and *Rapid*, and the R.I.N. sloops *Kistna* and *Flamingo*. The Senior Officer of Advanced Force W, as the naval arm was named, was Captain Eric Bush, D.S.O., D.S.C., R.N., a veteran of the Normandy landings.

At 9.30 on the morning of January 21st, the 4th and 71st Indian Infantry Brigades landed at Kyaukpyu, on the northern tip of Ramree Island. They met with little opposition and pushed straight on down the island. The Japanese had expected them to arrive further along this coast, and had prepared strong positions on the southern bank of Yanbank chaung. Neither the British infantry attack nor the Fleet bombardment nor the strafing by the carrier *Ameer's* Hellcats could shift them, so 71st Brigade was ordered to pass round the chaung by a wide flanking movement and march on Ramree town on the far side of the island. Destroyers were sent up the eastern shore to support them, while the 36th Indian Infantry

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Last Ditch. They came west on a wave of military glory, to win an empire and inherit the earth. For a few months they were masters of this dream ; then things went wrong. As they retreated, beset by a phœnix enemy, they found themselves in the swamps of Western Burma, hungry, hunted, and without hope. And here, 3,000 miles from home, they died. It was to have been very different.

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Brigade was landed on the southern tip of the island. The Japanese position on Yanbank chaung was thus turned; they withdrew to the east, allowing 4th Brigade to cross the chaung and follow them in pursuit. This was the end of their effective defence, though units still resisted capture and no more than 20 men of the 1,000 who had held Ramree ever surrendered. They drifted into the swamps on the eastern side of the island, seeking to escape across the river to the mainland.

A frightful fate awaited them. The army penned them into their swamp. British destroyers, sloops, minesweepers and landing craft had blocked the waterways. The R.A.F. strafed their boats. In this dark, noisome fastness of mud and mangrove, a prey to flies, mosquitoes, scorpions, and most horrible, the crocodiles, and without food or water, the Japanese died in hundreds. By night some tried to swim or raft across the chaungs on bamboos plugged at either end, and were shot by the British patrols. Many were drowned, or else the crocodiles got them. From waiting in boats concealed under the overhanging trees the British changed their policy to switching on their headlamps and lighting up the gloomy swamp like Piccadilly (one region was so named).

One misty dawn, after a night in which more than a hundred of the enemy had been ambushed, a Japanese doctor who could bear it no longer came floating down a chaung on a log and surrendered. He offered to call on others to do the same. All day long a motor-launch cruised up and down while he called on the Sons of Heaven to come out of hiding and give themselves up. A pair of landing craft followed, with guards embarked and cargo nets stretched across their holds to house the prisoners. The sun rose high and sank; not a single Japanese appeared. At sunset the prisoner convoy returned to base, and the chaung blockers settled down to killing. On February 22nd the ships were withdrawn. Ramree Island was cleared, and the objectives which required its occupation secured. The development of the airfields was already going on.

The Navy continued to put landing parties ashore, for it was necessary both to push forward a protective screen for the new British acquisitions and to hold on to the tail of the enemy. While the Ramree operations had been going on Royal Marines of the East Indies Fleet had occupied Cheduba Island without opposition. Further beachheads were established, notably at Letpan, to enable 26 Div. to destroy the Japanese by blocking their last escape hatch over the Taungup Pass. In these operations the Arakan Coastal Forces and Bengal Auxiliary Flotilla distinguished themselves, and the men of the Burmese Navy proved to be as handy sailors as their comrades of the Royal Navy and Royal Indian Navy.

The war in the chaungs had called not only for daring in action but for unceasing care in the maintenance of vessels and vehicles. It is an exacting job to keep your craft trim after three months' cruising through a swamp, or to keep your tank rolling forward when she is belly-deep in mud. The men of these Combined Operations in Arakan won their battle because they were better than the enemy at everything. He was outfought, outwitted and outworked. Though the Japanese in Arakan realised fully what the conquest of their key air bases would mean, they could no more prevent the Allied sword from being thus poised over their main forces in the Burma plain than these forces could stay it from descending.

18. THE FALL OF RANGOON

THE BRITISH purpose in launching the Arakan campaign had been achieved by securing the airfields in Akyab and Ramree. These had now to be exploited. The Engineers and the Supply services descended like ants on the islands. They had to build all-weather strips before the monsoon broke in the middle of May and rebuild and re-equip the harbour; they had to pile up stocks within the next few weeks, or else Fourteenth Army would be left short of rations and munitions in Central Burma, and the drive on Rangoon would peter out.

Four immediate problems loomed before Leese, the C.-in-C. of Allied Land Forces. First, the air-army administrative and supply establishments must be shifted forward from Imphal.

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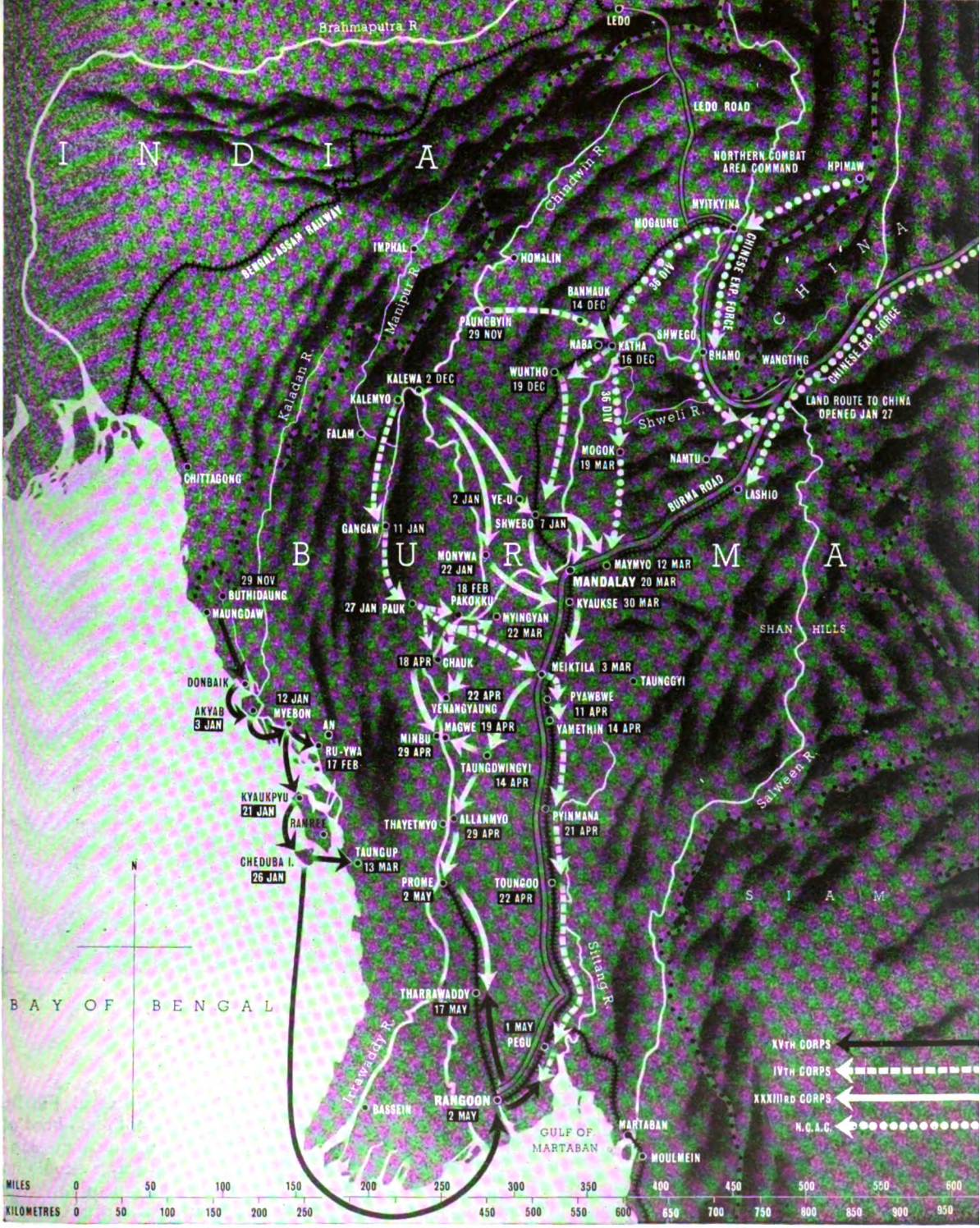

THE RECONQUEST OF BURMA. In December 1944 *four Allied armies took the offensive—XV Corps on the coast, IV and XXXIII Corps in the centre, and Northern Combat Area Command in the north. The Battle of the Plains, between the Chindwin and Mandalay, was hard fought, but by March '45 the two central armies converged on the city. At the same time N.C.A.C. struck down from the north. Slim crossed the Irrawaddy at Pakokku, took Meiktila, then Mandalay. Next he marched south, switching his XXXIII Corps into the Yenangyaung oilfields and the mobile IV over to the Pegu road. Meanwhile amphibious hooks down the coast won airfields that covered the south front. Then, as the monsoon threatened, XV Corps set sail for Rangoon, taking it from the sea. The Burma war was near its end.*

Open Country. Freed from two years of fettering forest mountains, and with Mandalay behind them, Lee-Grant tanks drive south through the open plains.

Second, a fresh land-and-sea supply must be created for XV Corps, since the majority of its air transports were required to maintain Fourteenth Army and much of its water transport was required for stock-piling. Third, at least two of XV Corps' divisions must be transhipped to India, there to be remustered in a new XXXIV Corps under Lieutenant-General Ouvry Roberts, D.S.O., for the invasion of Malaya. Finally, the weakened XV Corps must still press hard on the beaten enemy, for Leese's campaign plan provided that Japan's Arakan forces should not be permitted to reinforce her main army in the Burma plain. To ensure this, Corps Commander Christison must continue to engage the enemy in the An sector while he concentrated all

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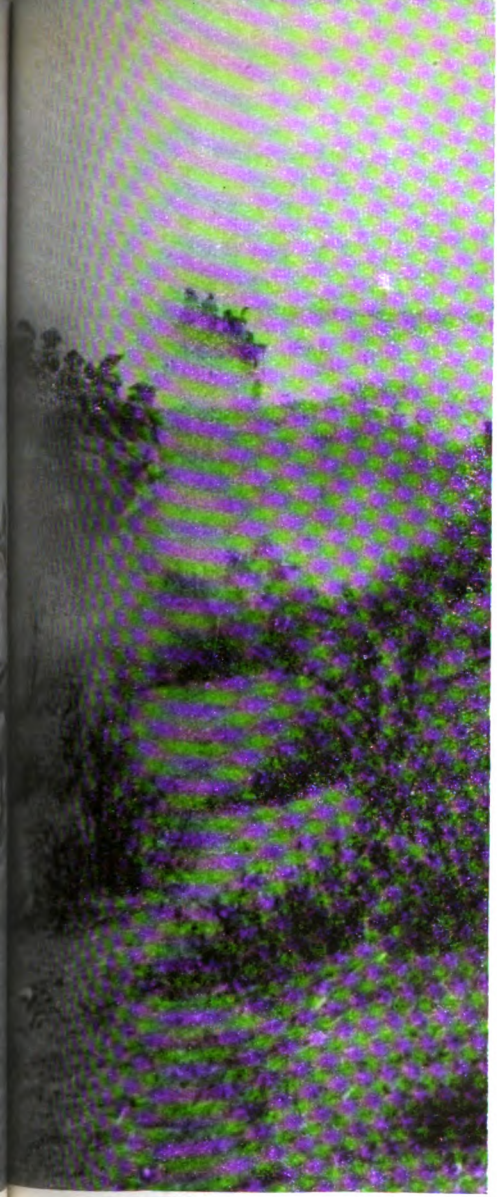

possible strength around Taungup. Between these two remote regions stretches an abominable road, and there is no harbour in either.

Over the land the storm cloud of the monsoon gathered. Its shadow fell across the British hopes and plans. Could Rangoon be won in time? Less than two months remained before the traditional starting of the rains, which is

May 15th. In the Plain of Mandalay Slim had finished his battle of destruction. Those Japanese who escaped this slaughter were herded into the Shan Hills to the east. Without motor transport, supply or supporting weapons they could no longer play a major part in the fighting. Slim had received bold and far-reaching orders. At all costs, and at full speed, he was to drive ahead to Rangoon. Slim pushed his columns forward so fast that the Japanese stragglers at Meiktila were soon left far behind. Their power to interfere with his line of communication was remote in any event, for in their area this line had largely ceased to rest on solid ground. Much of the supply of the forward troops of Fourteenth Army had become entirely airborne or waterborne.

It would be difficult to rate too highly the part played in this campaign by the air. After the tragic death of Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, K.C.B., D.S.O., who was killed while flying out to succeed Peirse as Air C.-in-C., South-East Asia, a new C.-in-C. was appointed in Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park, K.C.B., K.B.E., M.C., D.F.C. Until his arrival Air Marshal Sir Guy Garrod. K.C.B., O.B.E., M.C., Deputy Air C.-in-C., South-East Asia, took over. Under his direction and later under that of Sir Keith Park, air supply in Burma had reached a summit. It was done by imaginative planning and by resource, energy and courage in execution. The administrative staffs, the ground staffs and the allied air crews determined that whatever happened no failing of theirs should ever let the fighting troops down; the supply pilots doubled their hours of flying and staffs worked through the night. The result was a revolution in supply and in combat as profound as that created by the arrival of the internal combustion engine on the battlefield. Park wrote, "The armies advanced on the wings of the Air Force."

Besides supply, the air forces developed an extensive range of ancillary services. Their evacuation of wounded rose to thousands per month; they had long developed an air-sea rescue service, and they built up a jungle rescue service.

The combat achievement of the British, American and Indian fliers has been described. The figures tell less than their full story. They unloaded more than 80,000 tons of bombs on the enemy's ports, railways, airfields, camps, and (more than 60 per cent.) on battle targets. To

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compare this with the European total of half a million tons on Hitler's Reich alone in 1944 is to overlook that 1,000-bomber raids had no place in jungle warfare ; the largest air fleet assembled in South-East Asia was 100 aircraft.

The role of the Strategic Air Force was to deny the enemy both sea and land passage of supplies and reinforcements. The first of these tasks had been substantially achieved by the end of 1944, when the ranging Liberators and Mitchells were striking at Rangoon, Moulmein, Bangkok, and even Singapore, a round trip of 2,800 miles. These were never " saturation " raids, however ; the attacks were precisely aimed against harbours, dumps and industrial plants.

The next operation was an all-out onslaught against the Japanese railway system. Prime target here was the Siam-Burma Railway, which cost the lives of 11,000 Allied prisoners-of-war who built it under the lash, and, it is said, of 97,000 coolies. " Every sleeper in that railway represents one dead man," said a prisoner who worked on it. Stretching 244 miles across mountain jungle, this highway of blood and iron rides over 688 bridges, the greatest of which is Khao Phra. The pilots knew it as " Six Hundred Bridge," for that number of Allied prisoners died building it.

To keep their rail communications alive the Japanese constructed as many as four by-pass bridges to serve when the main one should be destroyed. They toiled like ants, and forced their prisoners to toil like the slaves of ants. But so thoroughly did the Allied pilots attend to the Siam-Burma Railway that they kept an average of nine bridges always out of service and limited the daily traffic to 100 tons.

Of the audacity of the pilots this story will serve as instance. Raiding Bangkok with his U.S.A.A.F. Squadron of P.38 fighters, Colonel Chase was forced down in enemy territory 40 miles north of Rangoon. One of his pilots flew on to Ramree, where he loaded an L.5 light plane with petrol cans, flew back 300 miles and landed in the paddy-field where Chase was waiting. Both planes flew home.

The commanders who, under Park, achieved the final air victory in Burma were Lieutenant-General George E. Stratemeyer, Air Commander, Eastern Air Command ; his Deputy Air Commander, Air Marshal Sir Alec Coryton, K.B.E., C.B., M.V.O., D.F.C. ; Major-General

Sky Force. The Allies' use of air power w... remarkable feature of the Burma campaign. Op... ing in one of the worst territories in the worl... turned many a defensive situation into victory... transport planes were the ravens that fed the bes...

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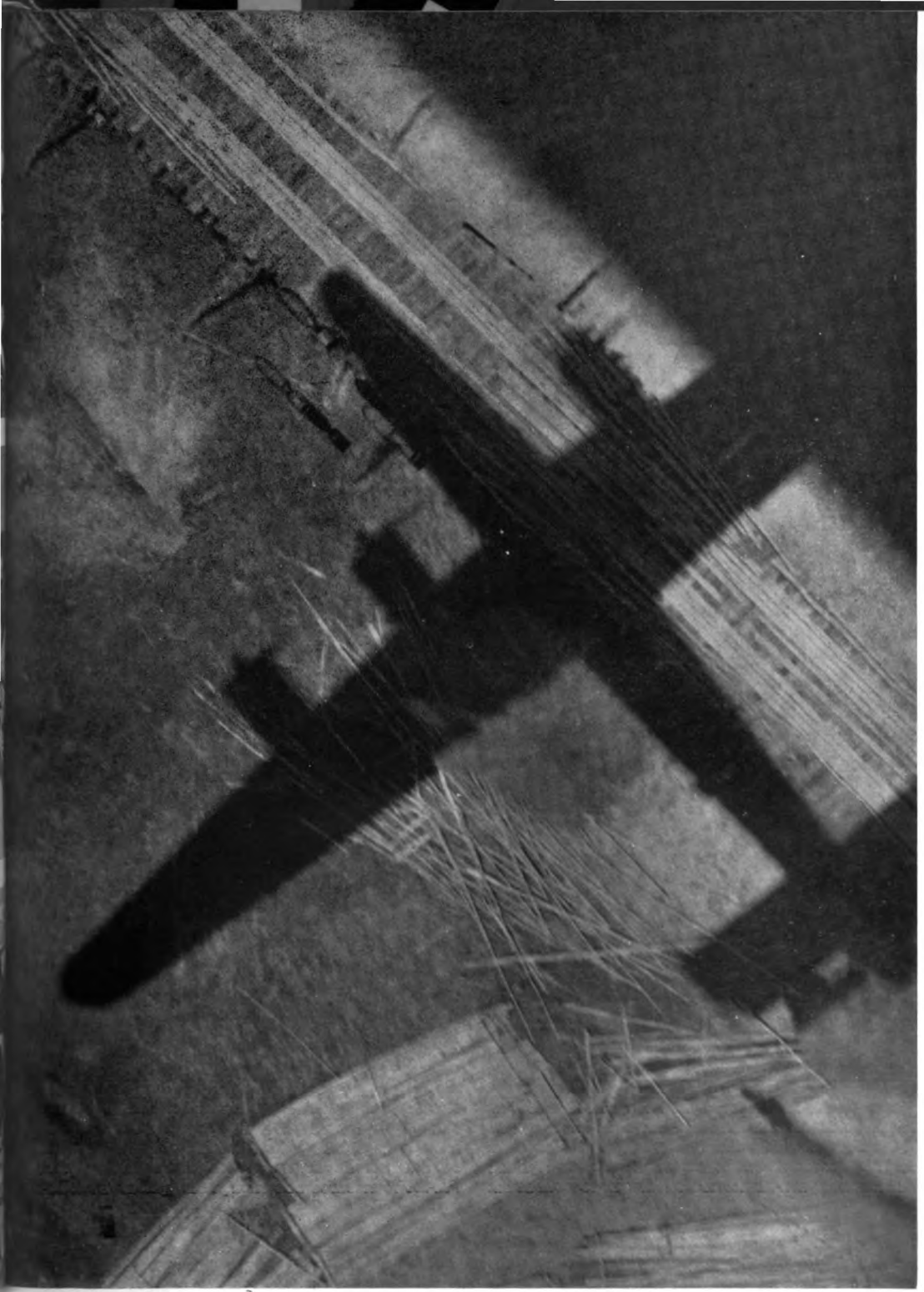

armies in the mountains of Arakan, Imphal and Kohima, sustained the Chindits in the jungle, and brought out the wounded from a wilderness in which many would certainly have perished. Later, with the Allies advancing, the fighters and bombers of R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. went out before them, blasting the enemy from their retreat roads and reducing their transport to chaos. "Strike. Support. Supply. Strangle!" was the slogan of the air force. Under the shadow of its wings Fourteenth Army conquered.

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Howard C. Davidson, U.S. 10th Air Force; Air Commodore F. W. J. Mellersh, C.B.E., A.F.C., Strategic Air Force; Brigadier-General F. W. Evans, who took over Combat Cargo Task Force from Major-General William D. Old; Air Vice-Marshal S. F. Vincent, commanding 221 Group; and Air Vice-Marshal the Earl of Bandon, of 224 Group.

While the Japanese front blazed, their rear exploded. They had come into Burma promising national independence to the people. Some ardent Burmese patriots had believed them; a number had taken arms with the invaders, as they sincerely believed, to free their country. The "Burma Defence Army," as these guerillas were called, was an undisciplined force, often given as much to looting as to fighting, and in the end the Japanese had to disband it. But mixed with the political opportunism and dacoity which accompanied the guerilla rising in 1942 was the element of genuine nationalism. It had been disillusioned by three years of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity in practice. The establishment of a new local "Burma National Army" under Major-General Aung San, a guerilla leader of 1942, did not compensate for the domination which the Japanese exercised over the life of the country they had granted formal "independence." Aung San shared this revulsion.

The reiterated pledge of the British Government to liberate Burma, not only from Japan but from all other controls and influences, including its own, produced in 1945, when it was backed by overwhelming military sanctions, a different effect from that which a less specific promise had evoked in the days of imperial retreat.

The consequences of this change of heart by leading Burmese nationalists were significant. At the beginning of 1944 British agents had found touch with Aung San, and by August of that year he had made secret overtures to the Command, offering to organise resistance to the Japanese. Now, in March 1945, he sent word that he was ready to bring over his troops to assist in the final liberation of their country. These forces numbered at least 7,000 trained regular soldiers.

Mountbatten sensed the military value of having such a powerful guerilla ally operating within the enemy front. He had to satisfy himself both that Aung San could control the forces that he claimed, and also that he would co-ordinate his action with the dispositions of Fourteenth Army so as to cause the maximum embarrassment to the Japanese. There was also a political aspect. In the eyes of British legalists Aung San and his men had borne arms against the King and rendered themselves liable to trial for treason. But circumstances alter cases, in

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Way to the South. Men of the 6/7 Rajput Rifles march into the ruined town of Pyawbe. Rangoon is the end of this road.

Burma as in Italy and elsewhere. Mountbatten signalled the Chiefs of Staff for urgent permission to send liaison officers across the front to Aung San. The War Cabinet assented ; the necessary political steps were taken and the Chiefs of Staff approved Mountbatten's proposals as to how these " Patriot Burmese Forces " should be handled. From these decisions flowed an important consequence : the Allied armies occupied an enemy-held country with the active collaboration of its chief political movement and its only native military force. Aung San's troops rose and fell upon the Japanese rear. They killed a thousand of the enemy in key positions, and helped to disrupt the communications of his retreating army.

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Still there was the monsoon: it could yet thwart all operational plans for the capture of Rangoon. Though Fourteenth Army had advanced 800 miles since the jungle battles of Kohima and Imphal had broken the spine of the Japanese Army, the rains might save Rangoon for the enemy as once the rains had saved Calcutta for the Allies. Mountbatten dared not risk leaving his troops short of Rangoon. He risked assaulting it.

With Power, Leese and Park the attack was concerted. The operational plan was made in ten days, the planning room a tent on the shore at Akyab, furnished with boards and boxes and lit by an oil lamp; this operation, also, was one designed "standing up." It would go in by sea, land and air—what Churchill with sound strategy and imaginative vocabulary conceived as "triphibious assault." Fourteenth Army had done all that troops could do, and something else. Still more was now required, and given.

When the Japanese resistance around Meiktila had been liquidated XXXIII Corps crossed over the axis of IV Corps and tackled the still formidable enemy defences in front of the Kyauk oilfields. For IV Corps, which was a smaller but far more highly mechanised formation, the task assigned was to thrust straight down the Toungoo road, ignoring all opposition except that which directly barred its advance. Such a barrier arose within the first 20 miles at Pyawbe, where the Japanese had covered the approach with a network of mines and booby-traps, backed by anti-tank guns. April 10th was the black day for the Japanese: 1,100 dead were counted on the field next morning. The advance continued, with the tanks and armoured cars of 254th Brigade leading and 5 Div. and 17 Div. leap-frogging over one another.

With the armour went an aged but still active Stuart tank which had belonged to the 7th Hussars in the days of the retreat from Burma. It was that "test" tank which Slim had sent back ahead of his main forces to prove that armour as well as transport could be extricated along the jungle track to the Chindwin in 1942. Now named "The Curse of Scotland," the veteran Stuart was command tank of the 7th

From a stormy sea. While the main armies closed in from the north, XV Indian Corps raced down by sea from Arakan and sailed up the Rangoon River. They found the city burning and the Japanese fled.

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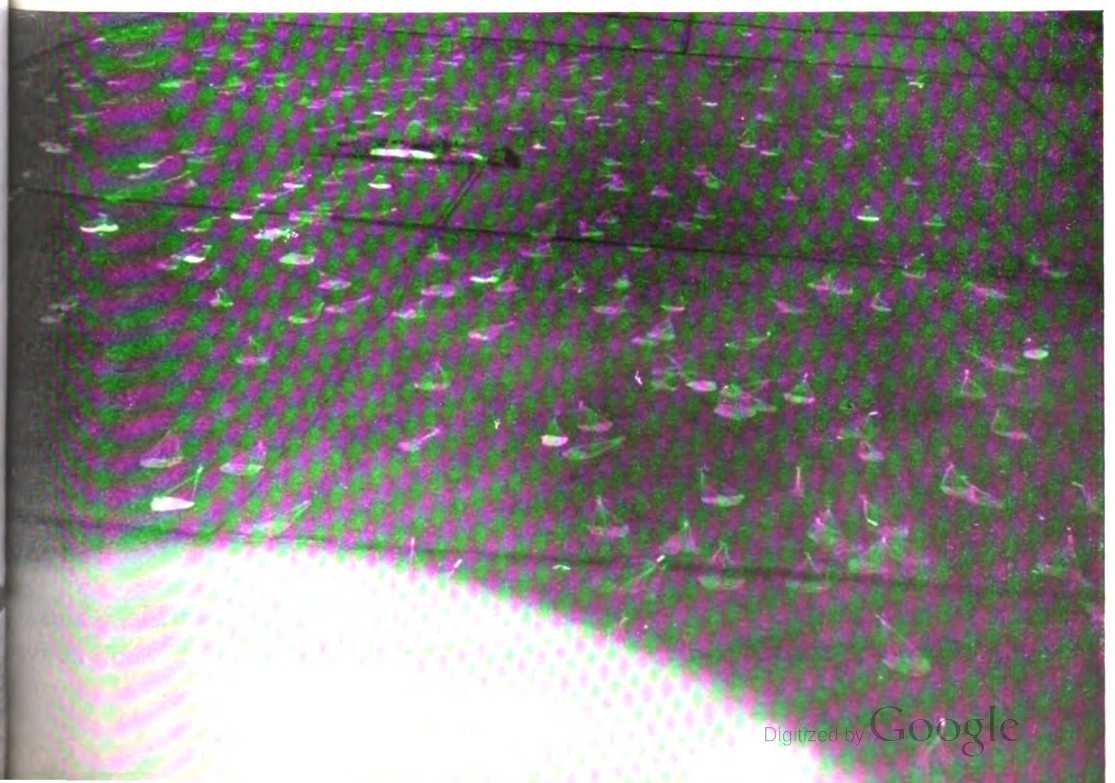
Light Cavalry Regiment. Other components of 254th Brigade were the 3rd Carabiniers, 3/4th Bombay Grenadiers, 150th R.A.C. Regiment and the 11th Cavalry (Armoured Cars). They drove the vehicles 1,000 miles without a single mechanical breakdown. Tank engine replacements were flown in, and the Brigade ended its march with the same number of vehicles as it had possessed when it set forth. The three armoured car regiments which accompanied the advance maintained 85 to 98 per cent. of their service vehicles throughout.

The axis of Messervy's advance has been described as "the longest and narrowest salient known in warfare." It stretched in the end from Pyawbe to Pegu, which is 250 miles, and was seldom wider than 200 yards on either side of the road—infinitely longer than the 60 miles of road from Eindhoven to Arnhem which was the corridor of Lieutenant-General Browning's airborne attack during the Allied thrust to Holland in the spring of 1945. The extraordinary sight was seen of the British armoured columns racing down the road while the Japanese trudged along in retreat parallel to them in the hills on either side. At Lewe the enemy was observed walking off the airfield as American gliders landed, bringing in airborne equipment to extend the runway. These stragglers were either captured later by 19 Div. as it swept the hills on both sides of the road, or else disappeared into the jungle to live a hunted, hungry existence and fall as final prey to the Karen guerillas. Four thousand of these tribesmen, armed and organised by officers of a secret British force, had risen on Slim's order. They killed a Japanese apiece in these wild days. At Toungoo the leading tank of 7th Cavalry motored into the town, ignored the upraised hand of the Jap traffic cop, and knocked him down. At Penwegin we caught the Japanese demolition party on the bridge, asleep. They never woke. Messervy's Corps arrived in Pegu on May 1st. Leap-frogging one division over another, it had covered 300 miles in 16 days : on one day it advanced 56 miles.

Slim, who flew over the battle continually ("It was the only way I could keep up with my army"), tells of the dash and exhilaration of the troops in

From a darkening sky jumped scores of paratroops to make sure of the city. They fell with the first drops of the monsoon, and left the surrounding fields white with the thistledown of discarded parachutes.



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THE MONSOON CAME EARLY, THE HOT RAIN STIRRED UP ITS FAMILIAR STEW OF MUD. BUT TO

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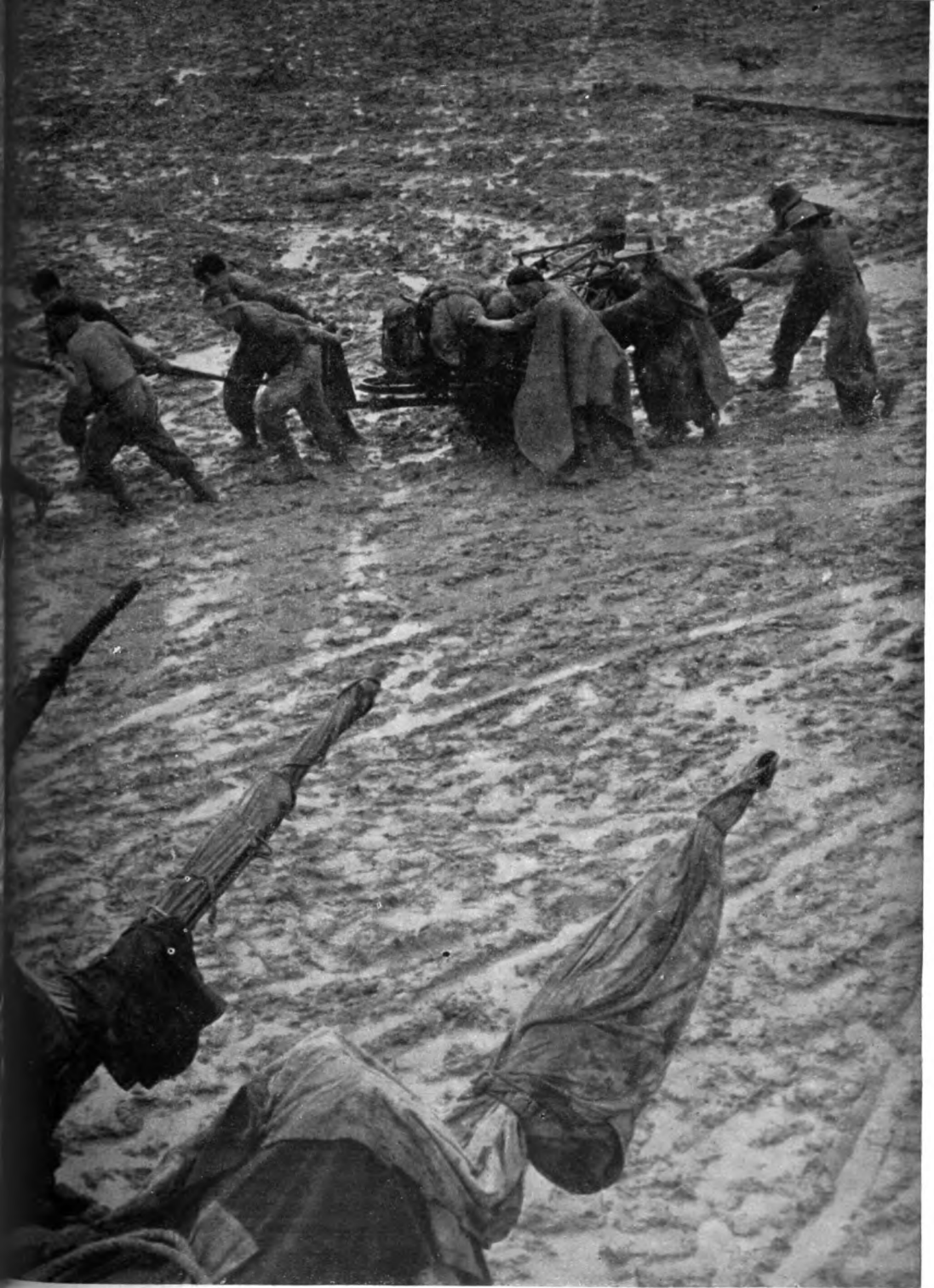

ED AND SWEATING MEN THERE WAS THIS DIFFERENCE: THEY WERE NEAR THEIR JOURNEY'S END.

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this remarkable advance. At Pegu an Indian infantry company seized a bridgehead by crawling across the single remaining girder of a broken bridge in the face of point-blank fire. Watching British gunners, stripped to the belt, slamming the rounds into the breech as fast as their gun could fire, the Army Commander said, " Sorry you've got to do all this on half-rations." He was answered, " Never mind about that, sir. Give us quarter-rations and enough ammo, and we'll get you into Rangoon." From his plane Slim could see Rangoon burning, though he very nearly missed getting there himself. For swooping low to watch a river-crossing, a Japanese ack-ack battery opened up and hit the plane in half a dozen places, wounding one of his American staff officers and planting an unexploded shell in the wireless immediately behind Slim.

In fact, the Japanese in Rangoon had already taken fright: they had fled to avoid being trapped. The garrison of Rangoon was now acting as a screen around Pegu, behind which the enemy sought to pull out his administrative and technical units with their equipment. To hold the pass the enemy mobilised shore-based sailors, fishermen, and even Japanese civilians.

In the oilfields to the north a stand-up battle still raged, recalling the days of '42 when Slim's 1st Burma Div. had been encircled and so nearly annihilated there. Now the Jungle Army had switched to desert fighting; on the dusty plain or the scrub-marked slopes of Mount Popa's dead volcano, XXXIII Corps fought it out in a temperature of 105 degrees. They beat down the formidable Yenangyaung defences, and by a series of armoured hooks sliced up the remaining enemy into fragments. The most brilliant of these movements was the march of Gracey's 20 Div., which seized Taungdwingyi and barred the Japanese line of retreat, compelling them to cross to the western bank of the Irrawaddy in order to escape, and thus subsequently to recross it. So disorganised had the Japanese battle become that for a week after Gracey had arrived in Taungdwingyi enemy convoys kept coming in, much appreciated by 20 Div.

The second axis of Fourteenth Army's advance lay down the Prome road, and, led by 255th Tank Brigade, Stopford's Corps now moved boldly forward on that town, which it reached on May 2nd. The next morning the monsoon broke. It had come a fortnight before its time. It was still too late. Rangoon was already British. It had been occupied on May 2nd without opposition.

Three weeks earlier the plan to seize Rangoon by seaborne assault from the south had been cast as a Combined Operation. Ships had to be assembled, paratroops on leave recalled, convoys planned and routed. The main assault force was to be provided by the 26th Indian Division, now commanded by Major-General H. N. Chambers. The objective lay hundreds of miles distant from the port of Akyab where the assault forces were embarked.

The operation was full of snags: the river had not been dredged since the Japanese occupation. Rangoon stood 20 miles up this broad stream with its varying currents, shifting shoals, narrow channels and treacherous bars. It was guarded at its mouth, on the west bank, by well-sited batteries and entrenchments at Elephant Point. These were formidable, consisting of concrete pillboxes linked by covering fire: they must be stormed and cleared before the main troop-carrying convoys could enter the estuary, for the only practicable channel for landing craft ran almost under the guns. Both the Allies and the enemy had sown mines there at different times. The sea approaches are shallow for 30 miles offshore, and therefore no ships capable of supporting a landing could get within range to cover the beaches. The air and airborne forces had to solve this problem: to clear the threat from Elephant Point by bombing it, laying a smoke-screen and launching a paratroop attack on the defences. To make the assault, escort fighters had to fly 250 miles from those Arakan airfields which XV Corps had conquered a few weeks earlier. The bombers flew from Bengal.

The follow-up of this airborne pre-invasion was not less hazardous. The assault troops had to be lowered from the seagoing transports into the assault landing craft at a distance farther from the objective than Calais is from Dover. It meant five hours in a choppy sea.

The operation began under Rear-Admiral Martin, of chaung warfare fame; the East Indies Fleet under Vice-Admiral H. T. C. Walker, C.B., covered the attack: battleships, carriers, cruisers, destroyers and sloops were there. British Pathfinder aircraft guided the American troop-carrying planes over Elephant Point. The smoke was laid and the Gurkha paratroopers jumped. It was their first operational action. They found a garrison of 37

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Japanese. They killed 36; the survivor was severely wounded. With flame-throwers, grenades and mortars Elephant Point was cleared.

Meanwhile six convoys of troopships, landing craft and minesweepers were assembling at the lowering point. As they did a storm of cyclone fury arose in the Bay of Bengal and swept towards the ships. It missed them by a few miles. In the swell of its path, by the fitful light of the moon and the lightning flashes of impending storm, the seasick troops were loaded into the landing craft and borne towards the estuary. It poured with rain. When their objective was swiftly overrun, the troops were reloaded and sent forward again, this time up Rangoon's majestic river. As they neared the port a sampan approached and hailed them. It contained Wing Commander Saunders and Flight-Lieutenant Stevens, who reported that Rangoon was undefended. They had flown that day on reconnaissance over Rangoon's airport at Mingaladon and had landed there because they had seen painted on the roof of the jail in large letters two messages to Allied airmen. The first said "Japs Gone." As many pilots might suppose this to be a Japanese ruse, the painters had added on the adjoining roof an unmistakable piece of R.A.F. slang, "Extract Digit"! This is not the place to tell what had gone on in the enemy's jails: enough to say that he had thrashed, humiliated and tortured Allied prisoners. They had borne their sufferings with fortitude and in firm faith that their comrades would come in the end and set them free.

At Rangoon the invasion forces landed on both banks. The western party comprised Frontier Force Rifles, Jats and 8th Gurkhas.

The Sweets of Freedom. The fall of Rangoon meant the liberation of thousands of Allied prisoners of war. They streamed from the prison camps, gaunt, bearded, jubilant, and famished for news and food.

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The Last Wet Days. The campaign drew to its close through the monotonous downpour of the monsoon. Under low-hung skies, linked to the earth by walls of driving rain, the Allies mopped up the last pockets of enemy resistance. Rubber-caped Indian troops, riding a Sherman tank, are shown advancing to action near the Pegu Canal.

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They occupied the battered quaysides. The eastern party were Lincolns, Garhwalis and Punjabis, with tanks of the 19th Lancers. They advanced in a blinding downpour across flooded fields to take the city in flank. They found Rangoon still smouldering after many hours of rain. The local criminals had enjoyed three days of looting and burning. Of the Japanese nothing remained except a handful of suicide snipers. Rangoon's fate had been sealed in the previous weeks of fighting in the plains.

A few days later troops of Christison's XV Corps made contact with Slim's Fourteenth Army, and again became part of it. On May 6th the river was opened to shipping, and two days later supply vessels berthed at the quays. Thus Rangoon was taken, after all, from the south and by sea. But Burma had been conquered from the north, a feat never before accomplished in history, and one worthy to rank with the most splendid of military achievements. The tasks laid upon Mountbatten and his Allied commanders of all Services had been discharged—with greatly inferior resources than had been deemed necessary by the Chiefs of Staff and Mountbatten himself only a few months earlier. The frontiers of India were safe. The road to China had been opened, and secured ; four-fifths of Burma had been freed ; the shield of Japan's conquests in South-East Asia had been battered down.

The road to Singapore lay open.

19. JOURNEY'S END

AS SOON as it became clear that Rangoon would fall the Supreme Allied Commander ordered back XV Corps from the coasts of Burma into India. At the same time sufficient divisions were withdrawn from the main forces in the Irrawaddy Valley to form the new XXXIVth Corps under Lieutenant-General Ouvry Roberts, D.S.O. These two corps made up the regrouped Fourteenth Army, now commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Miles Dempsey, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., fresh from the victories of his Second Army in the Battle of Germany.

In Burma there remained IV Corps and XXXIII Corps, which were formed into the Twelfth Army under Lieutenant-General Stopford. The two armies were commanded by General Slim, who had succeeded Sir Oliver Leese as C.-in-C. Allied Land Forces. The plan was that the regrouped Fourteenth Army should be trained amphibiously and mounted for the invasion of Malaya early in September. Meanwhile, the Twelfth Army continued to press the campaign forward in Burma. Stopford's orders were to capture the port of Moulmein at the mouth of the Salween River, barring the escape of all Japanese troops left in Burma and destroying such as he could catch.

The Japanese armies had been sliced into three sections by the double drive on Rangoon of Slim's two corps down the Prome and Toungoo roads. The first of these sections was the survivors from Arakan, cut off west of the Prome road. The second comprised the more considerable remnants of the battles of Meiktila and the Yenangyaung oilfields who were trapped between the two roads. The third, main section was the still intact Japanese forces east of the Toungoo road. Their purpose was to prise open a corridor through which their scattered units could pass to safety and reorganisation. To achieve this they attacked with characteristic ferocity. The Twelfth Army held them, and counter-attacked with superior power.

But when it came to fighting through the monsoon rains along the snake-like, twisting Mawchi road Stopford's men had to battle for every yard and build a bridge every quarter-mile, invariably under fire from the overhanging jungle. It was hardly easier going in the flooded paddy-fields of the Sittang Bend, where the 17 Div. had fought the first heroic, hopeless battles of the retreat in February 1942, and where it now fought the last victorious battles of the advance in August 1945.

The Twelfth Army exacted a hard pay-off for all that the Allied forces had suffered in the years between. In its short war-time career of three months it killed 20,000 Japanese. But its most deadly achievement was in the month of July 1945, when it wiped out 11,000 and captured the best part of a thousand prisoners out of a total enemy force of 18,000 to 20,000 men. In the end, Twelfth Army comparative casualty rates reached

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the height of one British to 64 Japanese. By this time the enemy was in an appalling state. Starving, in rags, and quarter-armed, those of his troops who escaped Stopford's soldiers and Park's pilots fell prey to the less merciful bands of Aung San and the Karens. These guerillas took few prisoners.

The final testimony of defeat was supplied by General Kimura himself. After the Mikado had accepted the Potsdam Terms of Surrender the Japanese C.-in-C. in Burma signalled to Mountbatten, " I beg to inform your Excellency that I have passed the order to Cease Fire to all Japanese forces with which I am in contact. If your Excellency will indicate to me the positions of units with which I have lost touch I will pass the order to them."

The British had taken the measure of the enemy's strength more accurately than he had himself. At the preliminary surrender conference in Rangoon between the Chiefs of Staff, Lieutenant-General Numata handed over to Lieutenant-General Browning his Order of Battle showing 153,000 Japanese troops in Burma. He subsequently discovered that only 63,000 were still alive. As to the units named, the list compiled by South-East Asia Command's Director of Intelligence varied from Numata's by only one brigade—and it was Numata who was found to be in error.

While Stopford pressed across the Sittang with the Twelfth Army, Dempsey poised the Fourteenth for the invasion of Malaya. This was " Operation Zipper," designed to be the largest all-British amphibious action of the war. It was mounted for September 9th, and the point of assault was the Port Swettenham region, in the Straits of Malacca, about 200 miles north of Singapore. The main invasion force comprised seven infantry divisions and an armoured brigade of Sherman tanks ; a British Parachute Brigade (which included an Australian battalion) was to be dropped on Singapore Island, and a Commando Brigade was scheduled to assault the island from the sea.

More than 500 R.A.F. planes, including Liberator and Mosquito bombers, Spitfires, Thunderbolts and rocket-firing Beaufighters, Sunderland flying-boats for air-sea rescue and Dakotas for supply-dropping and casualty evacuations, were formed up to engage in the Malaya land operations. But to such impotence had the enemy air power been reduced during the Battle of Burma that Mountbatten had resolved to land his army initially in an area where he must dispense with the cover of land-based fighters. Instead, he proposed to rely solely on Fleet Air Arm planes flown from ten auxiliary aircraft-carriers, two of which also loaded Spitfires to fly in as soon as an air-strip had been secured. Bombardment support, however, was to be given from the sea by a fleet of battleships, cruisers, destroyers, rocket and gun craft.

The R.A.F. attack was designed not to destroy the enemy's airfields (which the British proposed to use at the earliest moment after capture), but to shut off all supply and reinforcement of his forces. Arrangements had been made to build up eight squadrons of fighter-bomber Thunderbolts to support the drive on Singapore, and precautions had been taken against Japanese suicide tactics by air or sea unhinging the invasion plans, which depended much upon speed of execution.

The beaches chosen for the assault, indeed, presented certain physical disadvantages. It was judged that this was outweighed by their being sheltered from the monsoon storms of the Indian Ocean, and therefore permitting an earlier landing than would have been possible on the exposed coast farther north. Normandy experience had shown that it is better to accept difficult beaches if thereby the prepared defences of more obvious areas can be avoided.

Singapore Island itself had no beach defences and no minefields. It seems to have had no very enterprising commander either. The first Japanese defence plan was issued only on August 1st, 1945. It proposed the building of 53 strong-points in the centre of the Island, with much earthwork and tunnelling: in fact only 2 per cent. of this fortification plan was ever completed. There was virtually no inter-service co-operation, and Military Intelligence was faulty to a degree. Though Singapore was the headquarters of the Japanese Seventh Army, it had no contact with the 29th Army headquarters in Taiping, and each headquarters had its own ideas as to the nature and location of the attack to be expected. The Seventh Army believed that there would be a direct assault on Singapore Island about the middle of November with ten divisions, of which four would come through Borneo. The view of the 29th Army headquarters, however, was that the first British

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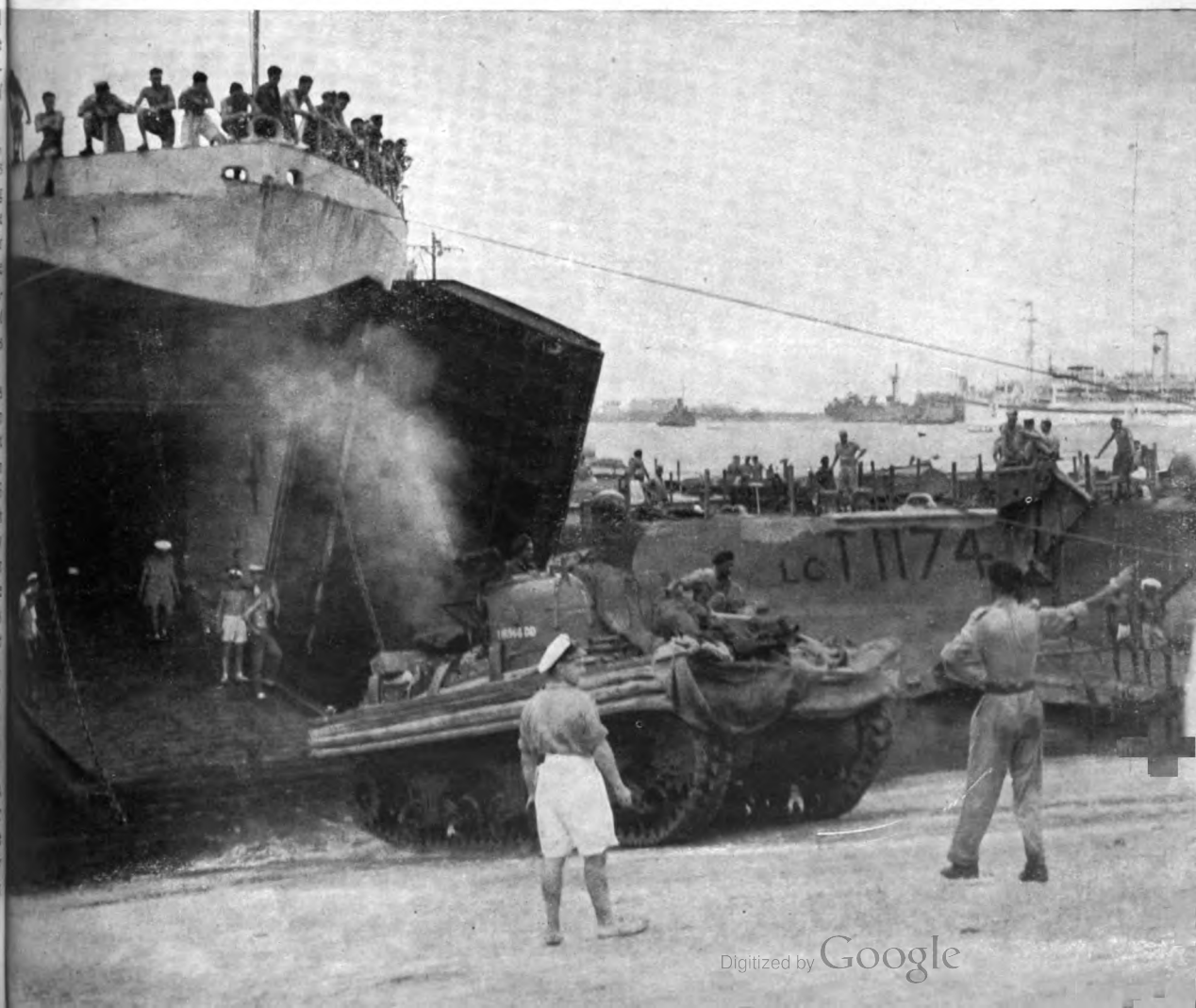
landings would be made on Sumatra in August and the main landing of six divisions near Penang. The result of this guesswork was that the Japanese had no firm idea of the chosen assault area, and if the landing had been made at Port Swettenham on September 9th it would not have been effectively resisted. The Japanese forces on the mainland were out of position, and invading troops could have begun their march on Singapore. Favouring the defenders in this operation, however, would have been the primitive condition of the roads and bridges, and, as always, the power of the Japanese to concentrate the chief strength of their army (its infantry) by rapid marching through rough country.

In the event, the enemy quit before the final test. Overwhelmed in two oceans by Allied navies and air forces, hammered on land by Allied armies in Burma, China and Manchuria, and dying in her distant conquests and at home from lack of ships, Japan threw down her arms and sued for peace. The atom bomb provided the curtain of fire to this predetermined act.

When the capitulation came " Operation Zipper " was carried through on the date fixed, though as an occupation instead of an assault. A hundred thousand men went ashore at Port Swettenham, according to the initial phase of the

Operation Zipper. In Rangoon a great force was gathering to invade the Malay Peninsula when the news of Japan's final surrender became known. The force set sail, as planned, and occupied Singapore.



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All Over. In Burma, Singapore, throughout the Pacific, the Japanese armies were giving up. Troops of the Royal Garhwal Rifles, *above*, are searching prisoners at Kuala Lumpur, Malaya. These were the masters of Asia, the men who never surrendered. Their raised hands mark the end of a myth.

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plan. The follow-up divisions went direct to Penang and Singapore by sea, to Bangkok and Saigon by air. The occupation was peaceful. On Sunday, September 9th—the D-Day that was to have been—*SEAC* newspaper's bridgehead edition appeared on the streets of Singapore. It reported "The Mayor and municipality are back at work."

Three days later, in the panelled Council Chamber of Singapore Municipal Buildings, General Itagaki, Japanese Commander in Malaya, Java and Sumatra, signed the surrender of all the Japanese armed forces in South-East Asia. They numbered 656,000 men. Accompanied by his Deputy Supreme Allied Commander, his Army, Navy and Air Force Commanders-in-Chief, and representatives of Australia, India, China, France and the Netherlands, Mountbatten accepted the surrender. He had driven to the building in an open car through miles of cheering crowds—a significant difference from the habit of the late conquerors, who on their formal occasions had cleared the streets, posted them with guards, and travelled in closed cars. Both to the Japanese delegation and subsequently in reading his Order of the Day to the troops and the concourse of Singapore citizens who had gathered on the Padang outside the building, Mountbatten made it clear that this was no negotiated surrender: the enemy had bowed to superior forces. One of the most striking evidences of this lay in the fleet of 61 Allied warships anchored in the bay.

A symbolic act sealed the proceedings. When Singapore fell in February 1942, the British envoys of the capitulation had gone forward to the Japanese lines under a flag of truce and bearing also a Union Jack. A few days later the Japanese had demanded this Union Jack from the British officer concerned (by then a prisoner-of-war in Changi jail). "You cannot have it," said the officer, "it does not exist. I burned it that same night on the ramparts of Fort Canning, looking towards England and home." The Japanese accepted this statement. In truth, the flag was hidden in the jail. It was used many a time in the next three years for the funerals of our men who died in captivity there, its story being unsuspected by the Japanese.

On the day of Singapore's formal liberation, September 12th, 1945, the Union Jack of Changi jail was raised over the city that their comrades had redeemed.

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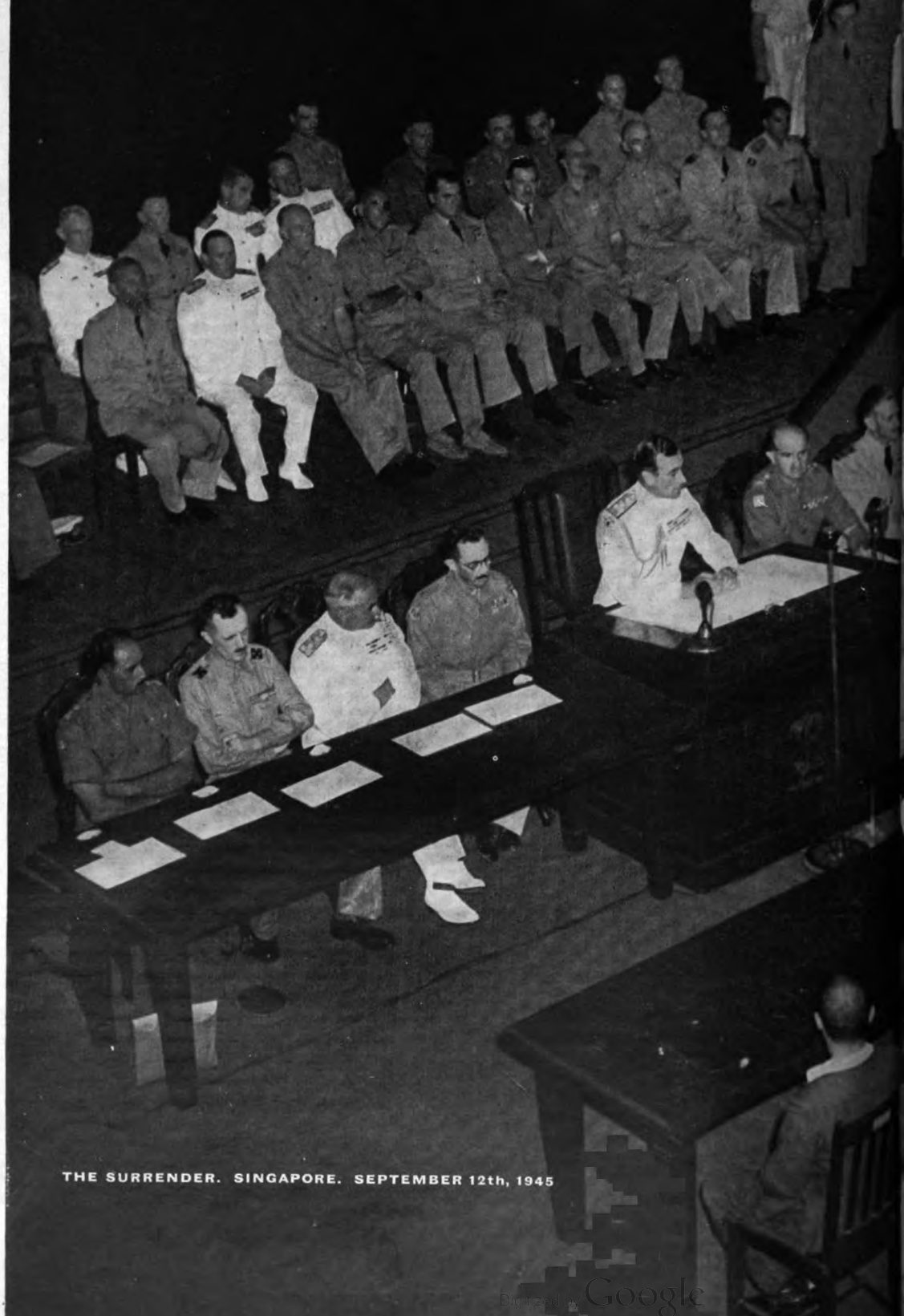

THE SURRENDER. SINGAPORE. SEPTEMBER 12th, 1945

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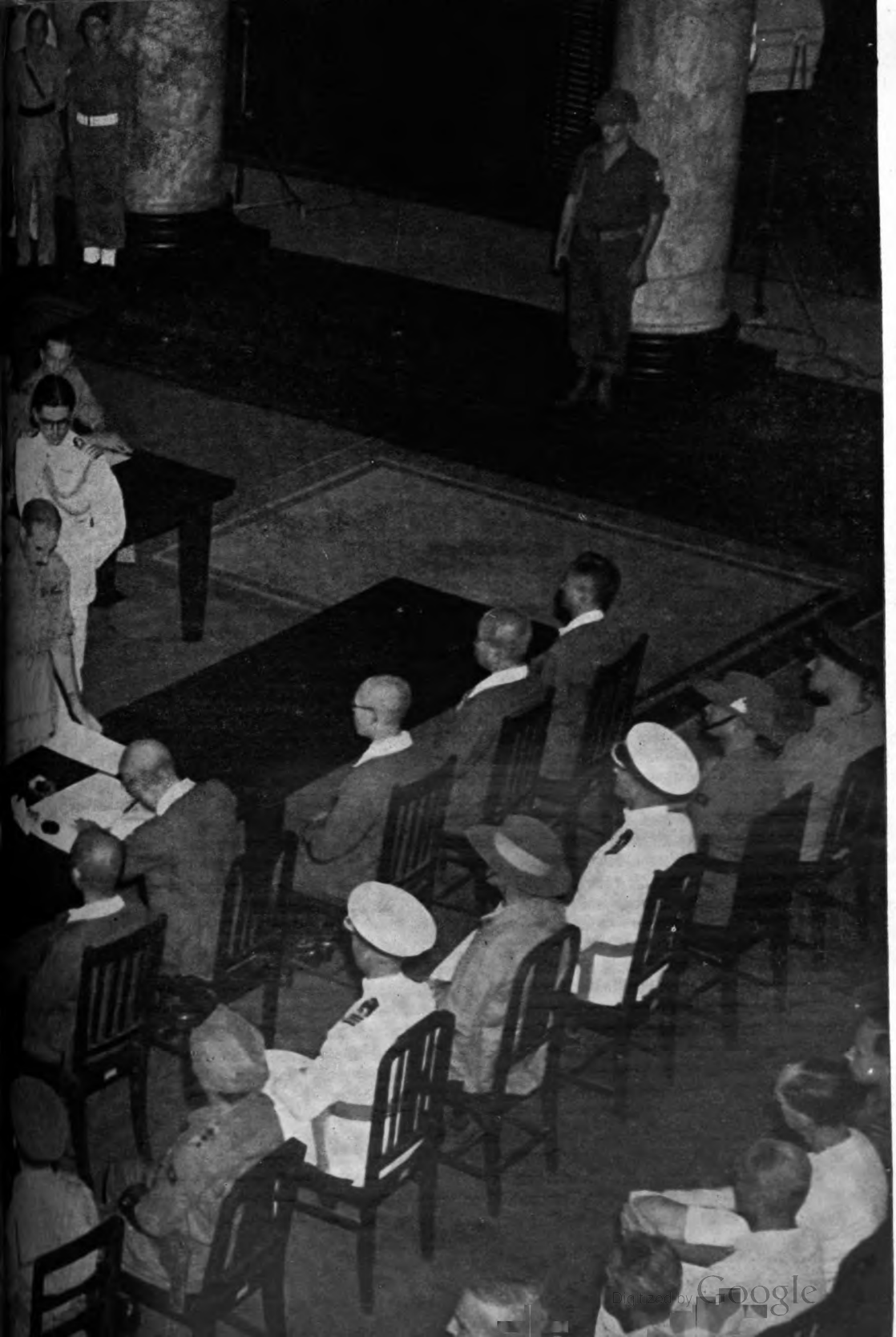
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EPILOGUE

20. LIFE-LINE MEN

"I HAVE soldiered for more than forty-two years," wrote Field-Marshal Lord Wavell, " and the more I have seen of war the more I realise how it all depends on administration and transportation (what our American Allies call logistics)."

In South-East Asia the battle of supply rose to a peak not imagined in previous wars. The operational area of General Leese's Allied Land Forces grew with its victories until it was larger than that embraced by Eisenhower's armies in Western Europe. The different tastes, habits and religious customs of British, Americans, Africans, Gurkhas and Indian Moslems, Hindus and Sikhs, multiplied the ration problem. The nature of the country, its climate and its lack of land communications, have been described. The jungle is a place not even fit for war. Half a million Allied troops marched and fought in it for years : how they even lived there is a miracle.

The Fourteenth Army alone required 2,000 tons of food a day, and though " Grocer Alf " Snelling, its resourceful Major-General of Administration, also became " Farmer Alf " with a 13,000-acre jungle farm, he could never grow a hundredth of what his customers ate. Burma's roads, rivers, and finally her skies were harnessed to make the equation of supply.

At the head of the team who worked out the sum in victory stood Lieutenant-General Wheeler, South-East Asia Command's Principal Administrative Officer. Next in the chain was Major-General C. E. N. Goddard, C.I.E., C.B.E., M.V.O., M.C., who was Allied Land Forces first Major-General of Administration ; he was succeeded in this post in December 1944 by Major-General E. M. Bastyan, C.B., C.B.E., organiser of the logistical triumph of the 1,000-mile advance on Rangoon. The three men who, under him, kept ever moving and ever supplied the three main land forces (Fourteenth Army, XV Corps and Northern Combat Area Command) were Major-General A. Snelling, Brigadier N. D. Wingrove and Major-General Lewis A. Pick, of Ledo Road fame.

The first task of all was to build roads, for not a mile of modern highway existed in the region where the army found itself at the end of the retreat in 1942. Roads had to be built then, across tracts where human foot had hardly traced its print. We shall record the feat of the military engineers in transforming this wilderness into a field for some of the most mobile operations in history. These early days of the campaign were also a triumph of civilian co-operation and enterprise.

On March 1st, 1942, at Delhi the Quarter-master-General appealed to the Indian Tea Association for aid in " certain projects essential to the defence of the Eastern frontiers." These projects were, initially, to build roads in Manipur : most urgently, to complete that one which led from Palel to Tamu, so that the British rearguard could bring its guns out of Burma and defend the border. Within a few days 6,000 labourers from the tea estates were assembled, and went forward into the Chin Hills. The roadmaking machinery available at that period was a single section of Army

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bulldozers, manned by Punjabis. Each planter group-leader, being allotted a strip of jungle, began to hack out his section of the road by hand. There was no time to build camps for these auxiliary pioneers. They slept by the roadside. They completed their road in time.

By the end of March more than 28,000 tea estate labourers were widening and improving the sector that runs from the railhead at Dimapur to Imphal. The planters took with them their estate doctors, who set up field dispensaries and hospitals. They tended every one who called—labourers, natives, refugees, sick and wounded soldiers. Later, the India Tea Association evolved a scheme which provided the Army with a regular labour force of 82,000 coolies. The total strength of imported and local labour employed on military projects in Fourteenth Army's area rose to three times this figure, and all had to be fed and transported.

Some account has been given of the railway problem on the lines serving the front, and of the steps taken to deal with it. Railway and sea traffic throughout India west of the Brahmaputra River were the concern solely of India Command; trains became the direct responsibility of South-East Asia Command only when they had crossed the river. This railway, designed to carry a few tea plantation trains, was required to shift 6,000 tons a day into Manipur and as much again to Ledo, besides troop trains, leave trains, medical and L. of C. goods. It was roads, above all, which occupied the waking hours of the quartermasters and provided their nightmares.

While the main forces of Fourteenth Army were based in Manipur, though road-maintenance was an unending obligation, it was one which could be steadily discharged. The Army's traffic figures bear testimony to the sound condition of their roads. During the worst weather months of 1944, the truck drivers kept up a daily average of 77 miles from railhead to the forward areas. They averaged nearly 28,000 miles per accident, though you would never believe it as you raced round those shelf-like roads with your wheels on the brink of a precipice. Working round the clock, the Sepoy drivers delivered 3,000 tons a day to the marching armies.

Along the roads there sprang up a chain of engineering depots, where vehicles were serviced, repaired, and even rebuilt. At Shingbwiyang, on the Burma side of the Ledo mountain, Northern Combat Area Command had the show-piece of front-line shops. It was housed in spacious steel-pillared barns, fitted with seven-ton lathes and radial drills, manned by a complete volunteer crew of factory technicians from the Illinois Caterpillar works at Peoria. It possessed a foundry, a store which boasted 10,000 spare parts for every American engine on the front. They could build a tractor at "Little Peoria" in ten days, and might well have built a tank. Such mechanical riches as these were not to be found on the Manipur or Arakan fronts, and yet in the end Fourteenth Army fought its way into Burma with a land supply route of 400 jungle miles.

But every variety of transport was pressed into service. There were mules from Africa, India and America: little South African donkeys, with such enormous heads that horses' bridles were too small for them: oxen, and even elephants. The Allies used the elephants less for transport than the Japanese did, preferring their services as bridge-builders. An elephant can lay a plank with the precision of a carpenter. He can also lay off work with the same precision. There were elephants who would "down trunks" at 6 p.m., winter or summer, so that the fading light had nothing to do with their habit. Some elephants are docile, and some are not. Bandoola, who was a splendid worker, killed five of his mahouts, and the latest one had an assistant with a spear in constant attendance.

The animals had to put up with a lot while serving with the Fourteenth Army. Mules, horses and oxen fell over precipices. They were flown over the mountains in aircraft, hauled across the rivers, sometimes under water. In Arakan, where an overhead endless rope railway leaps over the Mayu Range, a mule has been seen coming over the sky-line 30 feet above the crest, slung from a travelling cradle.

The Fourteenth Army also made use of the rivers and mountain streams for transportation. Native bargemen hauled their laden craft up the gorges for days on end, or rode them as horses down over the falls. Barge, raft, sampan and canoe were mobilised. A couple of soldiers' "navies" (the Chindit Navy and the Chindwin Navy) came into brief and adventurous existence.

The "Chindit Navy," which operated during Lentaigne's campaign in the heart of Japanese-held territory, was organised to evacuate wounded across Indawgyi Lake and down the chaungs

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Trunk Lines. A team of transport elephants go stepping through the mud Life-lines in Burma were many and various. From air-ferry, truck-convoy,

of the Mogaung Valley. It consisted of local country boats and rubber Ranger craft. Chindit sappers lashed five of these rubber boats together, built on them a superstructure and mast of bamboo, and fitted them with a couple of 22-h.p. outboard motors. With a tarpaulin canopy to ward off sun and monsoon they made fine hospital ships, and a valuable extra supply line.

The " Chindwin Navy " was born six months later when the Fourteenth Army had crossed the river and was marching on Mandalay. It consisted of two wooden gunboats, *Pamela* and *Una*, named after daughters of Mountbatten and Slim, and launched by Slim with a blow of a Gurkha's *kukri*. Commanded by lieutenants of the Royal Navy, and flying the White Ensign, they were intended to act as armed escort to the large and variegated armada of Inland Waterways Transport, which included coastal shipping, lighters, barges, tugs, launches and pontoons. Movements and Transportation, which was the Allied Land Forces organisation for shifting forward the ground supply of troops, had assembled this motley fleet to ferry down stream a bulk of goods that could never have been delivered by road. Their shipments were 38,000 tons. The " Chindwin Navy " patrolled the river, protecting these convoys and shooting at any threatened " river-blocks." After their first action General Slim signalled to Admiral Power " Our Chindwin girls have at last reached glorious womanhood ": to which Power replied, " Dear me, I had no idea our girls were so fast."

At Kalewa, Movements and Transportation established a local Chindwin shipbuilding industry. At one shipbuilding yard Artisan Works Companies of the Royal Engineers constructed, caulked, pitched and launched 700 pontoons of timber felled from near-by Forest Companies. Lashed together in threes, and decked, they lifted 30 tons. Further downstream " M. & T." set up a yard in which prefabricated craft were assembled from sections flown in from the Arakan port of Chittagong, or carried by road 300 miles from Dimapur

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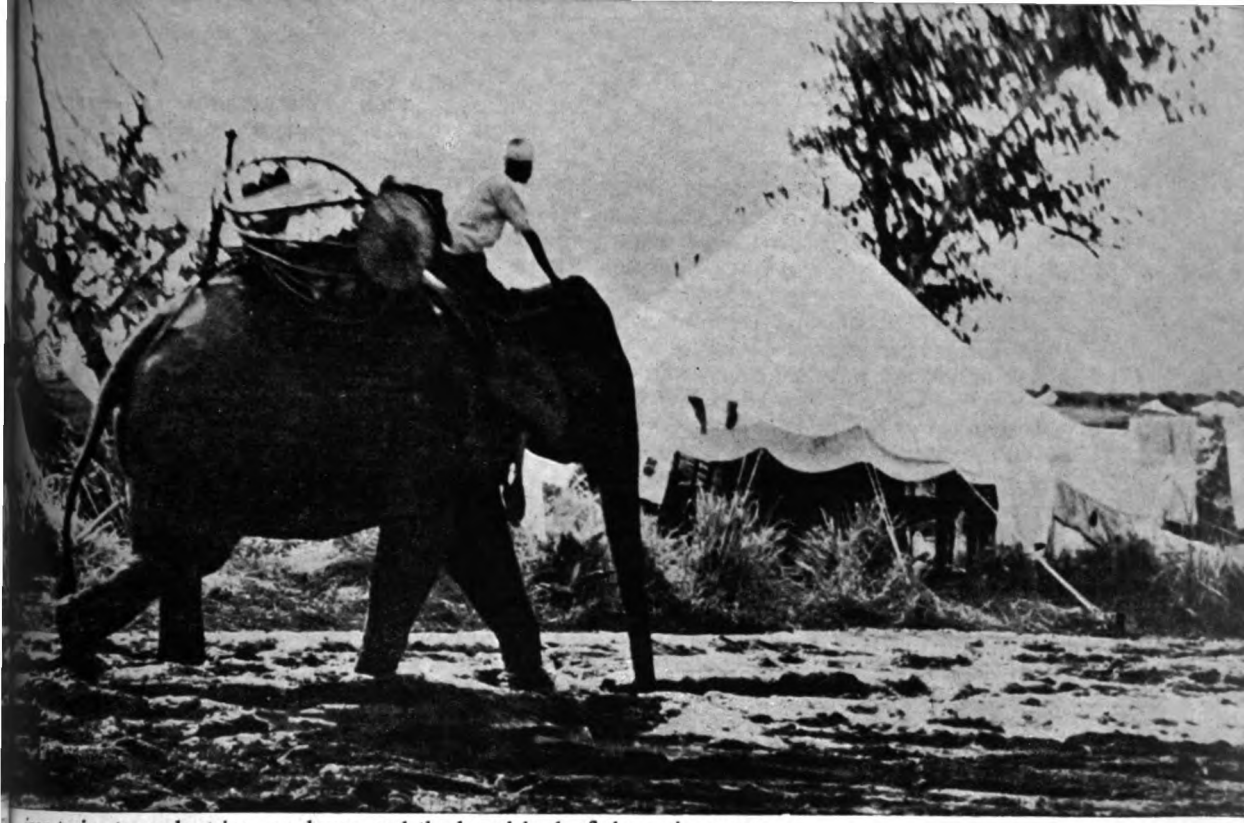

jeep-train, to mule-string, ox, horse, and the broad back of the native porter, every form of transport was used to supply the almost inaccessible battlefields.

railhead. Locomotives, rolling-stock and 2,500 tons of repair materials to operate the recaptured Burma railways came in by the same routes. Three MacArthur locos, each weighing more than 70 tons, made the journey over the mountain highways; an 18-ton crane accompanied the trailers to lift their tails round the bends.

But all these traditional methods of supply (there was a 500-mile oil pipe-line too) steadily receded in importance compared with air transport. It is an old saying that an Army marches on its stomach, and it remains true, but the Fourteenth was the first to have the needs of its stomach flown to it. Starting from the supply of besieged garrisons or raiding columns, air supply on the Burma Front grew until two army corps racing with motorised formations towards Rangoon were provisioned, fuelled and munitioned by aircraft. It was, in fact, only because of this novel line of communication that such an astonishing attack in depth could be mounted. The revolution in supply wrought in South-East Asia has revised the laws of strategy.

Air supply did not arise at haphazard, or to retrieve a sudden disaster. Before the campaign opened in October 1943 it had been foreseen, and intended, that troops in forward positions would often have to rely on getting their rations and ammunition by air. So an Air Supply and an Air Transportation staff came into being, working in close touch with what was then Troop Carrier Command, and later became Combat Cargo Task Force. In deciding where the air supply bases should be established it was necessary to bear in mind the protection of Calcutta by fighter aircraft. The final choice left no gap in that defence ring.

Air supply developed very rapidly. In the Battle of the Admin Box in Arakan, February 1944, 3,000 tons of stores and ammunition had been flown in. During the battles at Imphal and Kohima, from April to June, 76,000 tons of supplies were lifted into the combat zone, as well as two and a half divisions with all their equipment, and almost as many replacements. During the three months' siege of Imphal, when

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all roads were cut, every ounce of man-power and material that went into IV Corps was airborne.

Eight thousand supply sorties were flown, and some idea of their loads may be gained from these figures: 400 tons of sugar, 1,300 tons of grain, 7,000 gallons of rum, 850,000 gallons of petrol, 12,000 bags of mail from home, 27,000 eggs for the hospitals and 43,000,000 cigarettes. Seven principles control an effective air supply: (i) You must have command of the air; (ii) fair weather; (iii) be within "economic" range of your delivery points; (iv) have enough aircraft; (v) suitable airfields; (vi) communications to rear airfields by road and rail; (vii) a supply organisation which includes delivery of stores, storing, issue, packing, loading, medical reception, local transport and signals. Such of these requirements as human endeavour could meet were fulfilled.

Airfields soon took on the semblance of railway stations. So that they might work more efficiently, at every air base, in addition to the Air Force commander, there was a rear airfield maintenance officer and his staff. He received demands for all commodities from the forward units. It was his responsibility to see that these requirements got to the right place at the right time, a job involving precise co-ordination between the arrival of aircraft at their destinations, the rapid unloading of stores, and their dispatch to delivery points.

When staff had to be found to handle the rapidly increasing burden placed on Air Supply they were "borrowed" from reinforcement camps and any units which could spare them—and they came willingly. Two gunners gave their lives on their first trip in an aircraft which was carrying ammunition into Imphal. Theirs was to have been the unenviable job of pushing the ammunition from the aircraft while in flight. The Dakota in which they were travelling crashed while taking off and collided with two others which were refuelling on the ground. Explosion and fire claimed a number of lives among air crew and men who formed the administrative organisation which made possible the victories of Imphal and Kohima.

It will be appreciated that the swift expansion of air supply brought a host of problems in its train. Battle brought others, and still more urgently requiring solution. In the midst of operations, in which factors changed as suddenly as a Burma monsoon sky, it was necessary to deliver according to the latest order, and there could be no question of a trial run. In battle, the goods must be there and on time, else all may be lost. In the morning the priority requirements of a division might be artillery ammunition and bridging equipment: by nightfall the commander might be crying out for tank engine replacements and petrol, so that his armour could pursue the broken enemy. Thus flexibility in loading is as vital as regularity of supply. Much depends upon having accurate operators transmitting your signals, and more still upon imaginative and resourceful quartermasters foreseeing your demands. In Allied Land Forces there were both.

Air supply was operated by a joint Army-Air organisation. The mechanism was simple. At the dispatch end were the Commander, Army-Air Transport Organisation (C.A.A.T.O.), and Headquarters, Combat Cargo Task Force (C.C.T.F.). The business of the first was to control the assembly, flow and delivery of supplies to the rear airfield; the business of the second was to lift the cargoes, and to land or drop them. These two authorities worked together in double-harness. Brigadier Dawson was in charge of C.A.A.T.O., and Brigadier-General Vernon Evans and Air Commodore J. D. I. Hardman, C.B., O.B.E., D.F.C., in charge of C.C.T.F.

At the rear airfields a Rear Air Maintenance Organisation (R.A.M.O.) collected, packed, consigned and loaded into the transport aircraft the required stores, munitions, weapons, vehicles, men and animals which had arrived from base by road, rail, river, or another air route. At the front a Forward Air Maintenance Organisation (F.A.M.O.) unloaded and distributed the cargoes and the passengers.

The method of ordering and allocating supplies was equally simple. Corps Headquarters submitted periodic forecasts of its needs. C.A.A.T.O. and C.C.T.F. related these to their air transport capacities, and informed Corps what was available. Corps replied with its firm demands every week. C.A.A.T.O. then provided the R.A.M.O.s with the necessary stocks; all these preparatory arrangements proceeded under the general direction of Allied Land Forces H.Q., i.e. Major-General Bastyan's immediate eye.

As the advance on Rangoon accelerated, the traffic on the airfields became dense. On a rear strip at one moment 40 aircraft might be on hand. Three hundred and fifty transports were

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flying an average of three sorties each a day, and some pilots flew as many as five sorties. The turn-round of a Dakota C.47, which is governed both by its refuelling and its reloading, was often accomplished in a quarter of an hour. The larger Commando C.46 took longer. Over the forward strips the air transports sometimes circled in a queue, waiting their turn to come in. They continued to land by flare throughout the night. It was a 24-hour-7-day-a-week service that Combat Cargo Task Force operated.

They brought in an assortment of goods which included half a dozen 5-ton petrol locomotives to reopen the railway from Mandalay to Rangoon, tank engines, and sections of Bailey bridges. Seven hundred troops a day were moved in by plane, and as many moved out. In less than a week 7,500 troops of 2 Div., with 48 guns and 240 tons of stores, had been whisked off from the Burma Front to India. Though the transports operated as a bus service, it was one which frequently finished its final stage under fire. The Allied fighters held off any Japanese air interference, but the transports which were dropping supplies on front-line troops flew low through enemy machine-gun bullets and mortar shells, and some were hit.

To perform this superb supply service C.C.T.F. raised their flying-hours per air crew to nearly 200 per month. Ground staffs and administrative units many a time worked all day and night to keep the planes flying. Brigadier-General Vernon Evans and Air Commodore Hardman, who directed and drove this effort through, will rank high in the list of men who won Rangoon.

The sappers and pioneers re-enter the story at this point, for while they never ceased to push their roads forward at the rate of three-quarters of a mile per day, they also built 200 airfields in six months. About 72,000 engineers and 130,000 labourers, equivalent to the ration strength of a dozen infantry divisions, kept Fourteenth Army and XV Corps moving forward.

Both in operations and supply the signallers played a vital role. An outstanding command problem was how to control and co-ordinate the movement of units widely separated and by such impassable barriers. None of the facilities

Salvaged parachutes, gathered from the rocks and bushes of the front lines, were returned in thousands for use again. Air supply in Burma reached a peak unequalled in any other theatre.

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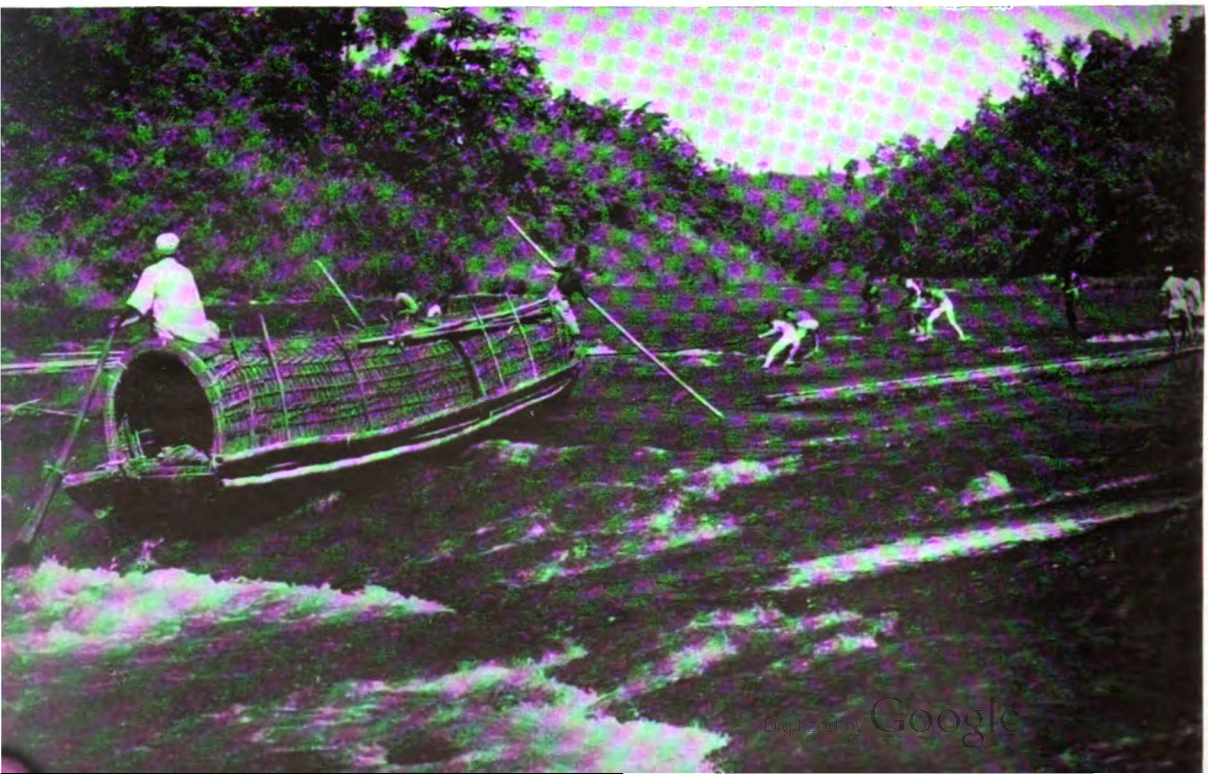
for intercommunication available in more advanced countries existed in Burma. "Signals" had to solve this. The development of air supply, which requires a complex wireless and telephone chain of control, added to the endemic difficulties of storm, flood and landslide. To lay their field cables the linemen had to become lumbermen felling trees, and quarrymen dynamiting cliffsides. They cut a swathe 60 yards wide through the jungle to build up their main telephone and telegraph arteries. Almost all their work was done in the face of difficulty, much of it under fire. Slim says that the most vivid account he received of the Battle of Bishenpur came to Fourteenth Army Headquarters at Comilla from a Signals sergeant who had climbed up a telegraph post on the Silchar track to repair the line. Having done this, the sergeant tapped the line, and gave his version of the fighting which was going on all around him. The eye-witness story was cut short by the sergeant saying, "The Japs are getting very near the bottom of this pole. I think I'll be signing off now."

Of such line of communication troops, who are not normally fighting soldiers, there are many stories of gallantry. In jungle war the land supply route is an especially vulnerable target, and at any moment mule teams and convoy drivers may have to fight infiltrating raiders. They did so whenever the need arose, and the military honours which they earned are testimony to their devotion. At Palel a section of a General Purposes Transport Company went into action as infantry troops, and two Sepoy drivers were awarded immediate certificates of gallantry. When the 7th Indian Division was fighting the surrounding Japanese in Arakan a Mule Company threw back seven successive attacks, and in a bloody night attack which failed a Lance Naik of the same Mule Company was decorated with the Military Medal in the field.

In those critical days of the Admin Box, 700 pioneers, Madrassis, Mahrattas and Bengalis, were taken off their routine jobs of roadmaking, airfield-building and other unglamorous though essential work and were required to carry food and ammunition over the Mayu Range. Few

Rivers were also roads; and barge, raft, sampan and canoe worked them continually. Native bargemen hauled their laden craft up gorges for days on end, or rode them as horses down over the falls.



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were hillmen, yet they performed like veteran porters. Ropes were used to haul the men up the steep gradients, and some lost their lives by slipping into the ravines. They made their own mountain tracks, where even mules could not go. Marching mainly by night, each man with 40 lb. on his back, they followed hard on the heels of fighting Punjabis, Gurkhas and British troops. They rested when they could, and they seldom complained. To the Indian Pioneer went the gratitude of every fighting man who knew him.

To ease the strain on his transportation while Fourteenth Army was still in Manipur, Major-General Alf Snelling had cultivated his farms. Some of these he carved out of jungle. One farm in Manipur was sited so far forward that the Japanese overran it, and an enemy ate up Farmer Alf's harvest. On his farms he grew vegetables, and on their by-products he raised pigs and goats. He started a duck hatchery to supply hospital units with poultry. For this purpose Snelling brought Professor Wang Mien from China with a staff of experts. The ordinary type of incubator was not a practical proposition, so the eggs were placed in unhusked rice. The rice was heated twice a day to the right temperature to hatch the eggs. The first experiment yielded 3,800 ducklings and the Professor set about delivering a regular flow. Snelling also put up a factory to provide the troops with thousands of pounds of salted fish daily. The alchemy of beer production for a long time defeated him, although he experimented earnestly with mobile breweries. When Mandalay fell, a prize of great worth came into his hands—a real brewery though a derelict one. But here crime, which is man's offence against man, defeated him. Some villains pilfered the spare parts that were being railed from Calcutta. Alf never became a brewer.

As urgent as the supply of the Army was the medical care of the casualties. The hospital problem was staggering. Many a man who had been wounded on patrol was carried a score of miles on stretchers improvised from groundsheets and bamboo branches. Up mountain sides, through torrents, along the slippery cliff's edge his comrades would stumble back to base with him.

The sure-footed Naga head-hunters were superb as stretcher-bearers. They would carry their stretchers for days on end as level as a billiard-table and with the gentleness of women, so that never a thorn brushed the face of the wounded. These poor, proud little hillmen refused all payment for their services. Frequently ponies accompanied a marching column, fitted with a ring-saddle for the purpose of carrying casualties. Where these were lacking, wounded men would lash themselves by the wrist to the pony's tail and be dragged forward. Whatever the ordeal involved, no living man was left behind on this front.

During a raid behind the Japanese lines a Gurkha was hit in the head. To all intents and purposes he was dead. But his pulse still beat. His comrades, worn out by march and battle and still harried by a Japanese encircling movement which aimed to destroy them, carried him for eight miles. They slid and lurched over wild, steep country until they were within half a mile of their protected base. There, setting down their burden while they rested for a moment, they found the man was dead.

The Army doctors and surgeons shared the hardship and suffering of their patients; the Bengali doctor who accompanied this patrol was also hit in the leg. He had set up his dressing-station in the jungle a hundred yards or so behind the point where the Gurkhas went in to attack the enemy post. As the casualties were brought back he tended them under mortar fire. A shell burst within a few yards of him and he was severely wounded. He continued to work, and later limped back on an improvised crutch with his patrol to their base.

On battlefields in more civilised lands, the roads enable ambulances to come close to the firing-line and hurry casualties away to the care and protection of not far distant hospitals. On the Burma Front the wounded had to be made fit to stand painful journeys by sampan, ferry, mule, jeep and truck, as well as aircraft riding through a storm. Private L. Widdecombe of the Devons got sprayed by a tommy-gun, receiving six bullets in his stomach, two more in his back as he spun round. No vital organ was hit, and after treatment with morphine at a Regimental Aid Post he was sent off on a stretcher to the Advanced Dressing Station, 17½ hours' march away. The Naga bearers cut steps in the hillside, squeezed through the jungle, and slung him over the river with a rope and pulley. At the A.D.S. they operated on him and gave him a blood transfusion. The next two days he spent being borne on a litter to a place where

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the medical jeeps could come. From there he travelled down the bumpy track to the Medical Dressing Station. Thence, via the Casualty Clearing Station and Field Hospital, he made the last stage of his journey by air to India and convalescence.

The part of aircraft in evacuating casualties began at forward air-strips which had been constructed under fire, and often remained so even while the wounded were being loaded. These strips were seldom more than 300 yards long and 30 yards wide. Light planes flew from them, bringing the wounded back to F.A.M.O. airfields from which Dakotas could transport them to main forward hospitals, where surgical teams and blood replenishments were available. In the end these forward hospitals were all regrouped near airfields so that delay in treatment could be cut down to a fraction.

The miracles of blood transfusions, penicillin treatment and neuro-surgical operations belong to a fuller story. Here we record that all along this merciless front the doctors, dentists, nurses, staffs earned the admiration of all and the gratitude of the stricken men whom they served. They were of many races, British, American, Indian, Burmese, Chinese. The name of the American missionary, Doctor Seagrave, who served as front-line surgeon in Stilwell's battles, is one which has already passed into legend.

On the British side there was Matron Agnes MacGeary, who was the "Chindits' Nurse." She and her staff of ten women worked unceasingly during the weeks when the injured and wounded were brought back from Wingate's Airborne Invasion. Always at night, when day's duties were done, the planes landed their load of grimy, bloodstained men, so it was a labour of all hours. The Chindits worshipped Matron "Saf Karo" (Make it Clean), for she kept her hospital a miracle of cleanliness and kindliness. This was the place where the men had any champagne that existed in the Indian cities and could be delivered there, while the officers at their own request had beer.

But if there were many wounded at the time of the great battles (there were 27,000 at Imphal-Kohima) there were ten times that number of malaria and dysentery victims during the same campaign. The battlefields of South-East Asia Command were some of the most disease-ridden parts of the earth. Besides bullet, bomb and bayonet of the enemy the troops fought the malaria-bearing mosquitoes, dysentery, scrub-typhus, dengue, jungle sores, and even snake-bites. It is satisfactory to report that examples of this last affliction in the oft-dubbed "snake-infested" jungle were few and hardly ever fatal.

Malaria is a different matter, or rather *was* a different matter, for the energetic application of every known method of malarial control cut this curse to a fraction of its former power. These methods included strict clothing discipline, use of mepacrine or atabrin anti-malaria tablets, D.D.T. spraying of infected ditches and pools and (by aircraft) of entire suspected areas, and, finally, the drainage of swamp land where the mosquitoes breed. A war waged as relentlessly as that against the Japanese and the jungle conquered malaria, and in the end only two soldiers in every thousand were its patients in the Army hospitals.

There is another group of men of medicine and the scalpel who come into any picture of the Burma War. These are the surgeons and orderlies of the Mobile Veterinary Units, who worked close to the front tending sickness and injuries among the mules and ponies which carried supplies into battle. Loaded with a couple of hundred pounds, these pack-animals crossed the marshes of Arakan and climbed the mountains of Manipur with mortar bombs exploding at their hooves and machine-gun fire lashing about their heads. Many were lost, but much was done to ease their suffering.

Working with the doctors and the surgeons were the padres, British and American. In action their usual place was under fire at the Regimental Aid Posts or Advanced Dressing Stations, where their knowledge of First Aid supplemented the work of the doctors. In battles for far-off mountain peaks and villages the padres were there with the front-line fighters, tending the wounded, comforting the dying, burying the dead. They marched with the jungle columns, facing death and mutilation at the hands of a ferocious enemy. In proportion to their numbers, casualties were higher among the padres than in any other branch of the Army. One of the first officers to be killed in the relief of Kohima was the chaplain of the Worcesters. At Imphal several gained decorations for gallantry in action.

A word must be said about the enemy, "the ant-like soldier," as Slim described him. He fought most bravely, and was devoted to what

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Life-line men of another kind were the doctors and nurses who shared the life of the soldier. They were at hand always, working in rain and mud, operating upon the wounded, and battling against disease.

he conceived to be his duty. But he was a brutalised creature: a killer of wounded; a torturer, who used the ancient torments of pouring water into a prisoner's mouth until he was drowned, or of forcing bamboo splinters under his nails, or of flogging him to death, as well as the modern horror of subjecting him to electric shock. The Japanese was a ravager of women; a looter; a liar; and he was unclean. He had to be driven out of Burma for the sake of the people of that land, who otherwise would have dwelt in a night of savagery. This is apart from the demands of Allied honour and security. The liberation of Burma was a notable military achievement. But it is as an act of justice and humanity that it will stand in the history of the nations who performed it. No soldier, airman or sailor who fought in the Burma War will ever be without his fragment of this glory.

A gleam of the spirit of the army which struggled and conquered in the jungle shines through the words which one of its humblest members wrote to his wife in India during the dark days at Kohima. He was a sweeper in an Indian Field Ambulance Unit, a lowly man whose shadow pollutes the very ground for many of his countrymen. He said: "If you hear people make bad gossips, stop them. It is not good that you should worry about me. I am happy here. I have a good broom, and will sweep the Japanese with it."

The story of this army ends, where so much of it belongs, in the remote hills above the

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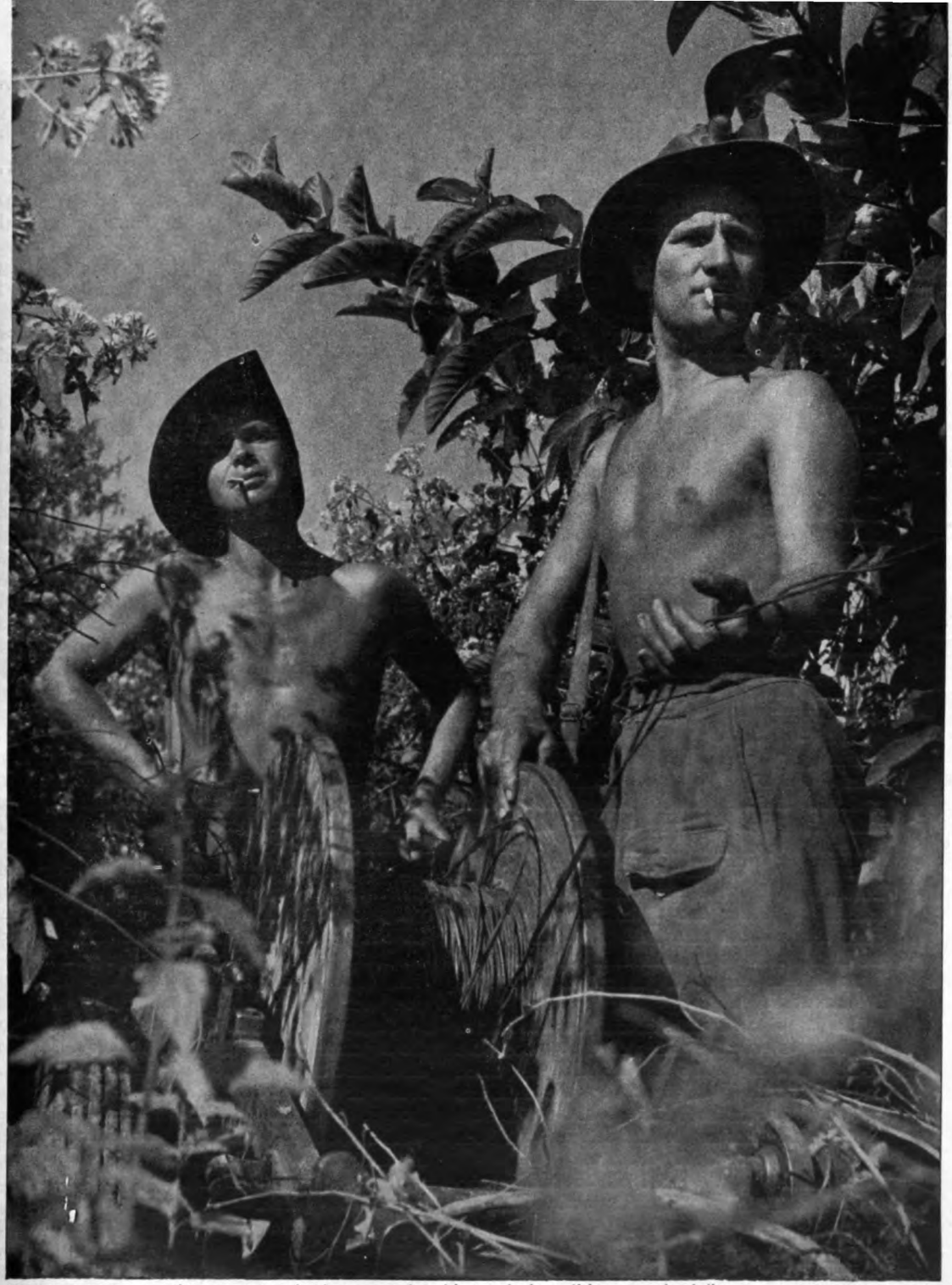

Manhandling a modern army over broken ground and in tropical conditions was the daily life of the Burma soldier. Guns had to be hauled to the tops of mountains, air supplies found where they happened to fall, telephone lines threaded through hundreds of miles of gorge and forest. The Fourteenth was an army that worked stripped to the belt.

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Chindwin. As peace settled on the jungle after four years of war and the last British garrisons were being withdrawn from their posts, one of them commended its graves to the care of the head-hunters who inhabit that region. Wrapped in his red blanket and stretching forth his tasselled spear, their chief promised in the presence of his village, "We will watch over them always, as the spirits of your soldiers will watch over us, for they are our brothers."

It was thus that the hill tribes of Burma regarded the Allied troops throughout the war, from the night of defeat until the noonday of victory. Nagas, Chins, Kachins, Karens and Lushais—they were themselves part of the Allies. At all times they provided men who were willing to go anywhere inside the Japanese lines, though death and probably torture was the penalty of discovery. After the Allied retreat in 1942 the Chins who were serving as regular soldiers in the Burma Army were disbanded and went off, with British officers, to form a guerilla force in the Chin Hills. The Chin Levies fought continuously for three years in the No Man's Land between IV Corps front and the main Japanese positions along the Chindwin, killing thousands of the enemy.

Chins also served in the Lushai Brigade, commanded by Brigadier P. C. Marindin, M.C. These veteran jungle scouts acted as a screen against Japanese penetration through the trackless hills which lay between the Manipur and Arakan fronts. When the general offensive of the Fourteenth Army developed in 1944–45 the Lushai Brigade blocked the enemy line of retreat, exacting a higher rate of casualties than any other formation at that time. Its advance from the Lushai Hills to the Chindwin was one of the finest feats of long-range penetration even in the Burma campaign.

The part of the Kachin Levies in North Burma has been described. Many of these, too, were ex-Burma Army soldiers, and they acquitted themselves with distinction both as the defenders of Fort Hertz, the last Allied post held in Burma in 1942, and later as guerillas serving with both British and American formations.

It would be easy to romanticise the hillmen who stuck so faithfully to us. They are, in fact, an extremely realist race (and, as the event showed, their bet proved sounder than that of those plainsfolk who once had accepted the Japanese). One of the laughs on the front concerned the Kachin old soldier who limped into a British command post during the advance into Burma.

"I was badly wounded during the retreat," he said, "and have been two years lying-up hidden in this village. I heard the British had come back. I have come to report for duty."

"This is magnificent," cried the commanding officer. "I shall see that your conduct is reported in Orders."

"Very good, sir. But I did not come here for that," said the soldier, producing his book. "You owe me two years' pay."

The Karens, dwelling within the orbit of the main Japanese power in Burma, were unable to offer open resistance, but they organised an effective underground movement. This was directed by two British officers who stayed behind as the Allies retreated. The Japanese got wind of this pair, and hunted them: the Karens hid them, and though one was caught and killed many other agents were later dropped by parachute. They organised groups of thousands of Karen volunteers with arms, instructions and radio intercommunication. The Japanese were not blind to this and from time to time took reprisals. To mitigate some of these severities against the tribe which sheltered him, one British officer, Major Seagrim, gave himself up: the Japanese executed him. There was a "Karen H.Q." at Fourteenth Army Headquarters: one of its principal problems was to dissuade the volunteers from a premature rising against their Japanese persecutors.

Their chance came after the destruction of Kimura's army at Meiktila in April 1945. Then "Up you go!" signalled Slim, and up went the Karens. Fourteenth Army staff officers had worked out with them the perfect guerilla operation, which is one carried through in conjunction with main regular forces. As Messervy's IV Corps pressed down the main road to Toungoo the Japanese 15th Division was racing back from the Shan States by a parallel route on the east. It had covered its intended path with protective groups. The Karen volunteers fell upon these garrisons, destroyed them and turned their posts into ambushes: IV Corps was first in Toungoo, and these Japanese never reached the south to join the final battle.

The role of the Nagas, the little head-hunters of the hills that rise above the Upper Chindwin, was different, for it was mixed. The Naga lands lay on the fringe of the enemy conquests: some-

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times the British occupied them, at other times the Japanese. No single instance has been recorded of a Naga freely giving help to the Japanese, but many a time was one of them beaten, tortured, starved or killed for refusing it. A Naga headman was flogged into unconsciousness, revived and made to watch his wife's flogging, because he would not betray the British. He held firm, and so did the woman. No people were more faithful to the Allied cause, or have deserved better of it, than the Nagas, "The great little gentlemen of the jungle," as they were described by an American pilot whom they succoured when his plane crashed in a storm over their country. It must be added that the Nagas did not confine their services to the passive endurance of outrages. They guided the Allied troops, hid them, brought accurate reports of the enemy's movements, waylaid him, shot him silently with their poisoned arrows from their cross-bows and chopped off his head.

Such was the war in Burma, ranging from the rocket-bomb to the bow and spear, relying equally at times upon the Dakota and the elephant. The wireless-set in the basha spanned the earth—and the picket was killed by a grenade lobbed from a foxhole six yards away. It was war against Nature—rain, mist, mud, and the blazing sun. It was war against savages, waged in a wilderness. The jungle had its own strange beauty, but it was evil: a place of treachery and terror, dark, dank and sour. At night this world came alive, and the sentry was alone in it.

It was a motley crusade. White men, brown, black and yellow marched under one banner, and only the quartermasters kept count of the different religions. Soldiers of fifty different races fought and fell at this distant post, many of them unseen, some even unknown. If men were brave, few witnessed it; if they had quit, it would often have been unobserved. All depended on the soldier and how he bore himself, and each fighter had to conquer his own heart.

This has been a tale of men, but there were women, too. None who served in the jungle war will forget them, who brought some kindness into a cruel place. The Women's Auxiliary Service (Burma), who marched step by step with the rearguards of 1942, and came back down the victory road to Rangoon in 1945; the planters' wives, who kept their houses going within the striking range of Japanese murder, and, offering a touch of home to the soldier and the airman, made him lose for a while the aching memory of home; the W.V.S.; above all, the Nursing Services. The men on the Burma Front prided themselves that they were hard, and they needed to be. Few did not feel a lump in the throat when, bloodstained, grimy and unutterably tired, they opened their eyes in a casualty clearing station while the guns still thudded and saw a clean, neat figure bending over them with healing hands.

Of these nurses Bill Slim, so long the Commander of the Fourteenth Army, wrote: "At Kohima and Imphal, on the sodden Tiddim road, in the bloody bridgeheads of the Irrawaddy, they were there—the oldest of the Women's Services, the best beloved, and the nearest to the soldier's heart."

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21. RECONQUEST OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

WHILE THE ARMIES and air forces of South-East Asia Command reconquered lands as large as Europe the Allied East Indies Fleet ruled over seven million square miles of ocean.

In January 1944 a British squadron reappeared in Ceylon. It consisted of H.M. ships *Renown*, *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant*, with the aircraft-carriers *Illustrious* and *Unicorn*. From that date onward no Japanese surface man-of-war dared show itself west of the line Australia-Sumatra-Nicobars-Andamans. Control of the Indian Ocean was established, and never disputed. The French battleship *Richelieu* joined the East Indies Fleet early in 1944, and for a critical period, when the Japanese appeared to have made a strong naval concentration in the Singapore area, the United States ship *Saratoga*, with six U.S. destroyers, came as a welcome reinforcement.

There were no lines of defence in this dominion, and no strong-points other than the bases linked by the ocean roads. Once at sea, a fleet or a convoy or a single ship was self-supporting until its journey's end. Yet this vast area was

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Eyes of the Navy. By contrast with the intimate, hand-to-hand fighting of the jungle, the war at sea was impersonal, stretching over horizons, the enemy a smudge of smoke, a blur of steel, or a far gun-flash in the night. It was a war of distance on a wide ocean, calling for the endless patience of patrol and pursuit.

held as securely as though it had been occupied by an army on the ground. Three years before this had not been so.

Three years before the Japanese had come riding up out of the China Seas, mighty with victory. They had sunk the battleship *Prince of Wales* and the battle-cruiser *Repulse*, captured Hong Kong, Singapore, Java, Sumatra and Burma, and occupied the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as forward air bases. Japan's surge of invasion threatened India and Ceylon, and both seemed fated to fall, for Britain possessed no comparable power to oppose it. Yet Japan held her hand; why did she not strike to kill? Had the conquerors reached the limit of their planned conquest, or did they hesitate, as Hitler did after Dunkirk, and losing impetus, lose urge? Did they see the danger signal from the East in the recovering might of the United States and turn to deal first with this threat to their rear? The Japanese made one determined effort to destroy the British Fleet in the Indian Ocean. It failed, and they never tried again. Though the British Army was deployed along the Burma frontier 1,000 miles away from Southern India the enemy never sought to invade the open coast. It remains a mystery why. It is known only that he did not come in final force to seize the richest prize of all.

At the beginning of April 1942 British naval strength in the Indian Ocean was far below that of the enemy. It included the battleship *Warspite* (Admiral Somerville described her as "a grand old lady who had fought at Jutland in the

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last war and had been rejuvenated, had her face lifted, so to speak, with new engines, new boilers, and anti-aircraft equipment "). There were also four battleships of the R class, *Royal Sovereign*, *Resolution*, *Ramillies* and *Revenge*. They had not been rejuvenated. Two of the three aircraft-carriers were modern, but with the exception of a handful of fighters, the aircraft they carried were not. Two of the cruisers, the *Dorsetshire* and the *Cornwall*, carried 8-inch guns. The available destroyers were a mixed lot.

The intentions of the enemy were not known, but it seemed certain that he must be meditating an attack on Colombo and Trincomalee, the remaining British naval bases in the Bay of Bengal. It was expected that the blow would be delivered at dawn by a task force of battleships, aircraft-carriers and cruisers. A few R.A.F. Catalinas regularly ranged the Bay from Ceylon as far as the Andamans, on what the pilots named the " milk-run," to catch the first glimpse of the Japanese Fleet. The skies were clear blue without any cloud cover, and since the fighters from the enemy carriers would be lethal to the slow patrolling Catalinas, in R.A.F. language there would be " no future " for the men who did spot the approaching fleet.

It was a newly-arrived Canadian crew under Squadron-Leader Burchall, taking their first turn on the milk-run, who had that honour, sighting the Japanese ships about 400 miles south-east of Ceylon, and headed towards the island. The wireless operator was barely able to make his initial warning signal before the Catalina was shot down. Admiral Somerville had already put to sea. He did not intend to be attacked in port.

Another Catalina captained by Flight-Lieutenant Jock Graham, a hero of Singapore, took up the shadowing of the enemy, and sent through two reports at night. Then silence fell again as he was shot down. Easter Sunday dawned, and a third Catalina, captained by Flight-Lieutenant W. Bradshaw, D.F.C., was watching the invading armada. He reported four battleships, whose class he identified, together with an unknown number of carriers, as well as cruiser and destroyer escort. Using for the first time " water-hugging " low-level tactics, Bradshaw and his co-pilot, Flying-Officer Charles Gardner, were able to shadow the Japanese battle fleet from dawn until dusk, for the enemy radar could not pick them up at this low angle. The faithful Eyes of the Fleet recorded the movements of the enemy every hour. Once the flagship *Nagato* opened fire at four miles range, missing her target with a salvo error of 100 yards. A formation of Japanese aircraft passed over the low-flying Catalina, but failed to detect it.

Somerville's four R battleships had been refuelling and his two 8-inch gun cruisers refitting when the news that the enemy fleet was out first reached him. Making for the open sea, the Admiral had ordered them to join him as soon as possible. In his existing strength he could not intercept the Japanese Fleet before it attacked Ceylon, but he hoped that by making use of darkness he might inflict damage on the enemy as he withdrew.

The Japanese planes arrived over Colombo at eight o'clock in the morning as the people were going to their early Easter Sunday services. Their hope of Pearl-harbouring the British Fleet had already been dissipated, and from the R.A.F. they received still more drastic disappointment. More than 30 of their aircraft were shot down. Little damage was done to Colombo, though a couple of ships were sunk in the harbour. British Blenheims made two gallant but vain attempts to attack the Japanese warships, suffering very heavy casualties.

More serious was the fate of the British Fleet at sea. The cruisers *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall* were sunk by mass dive-bombing as they sailed towards Somerville. This put an end to all prospect of interfering with the Japanese Fleet as it made its way home. Indeed, the hunters had become the hunted. Japanese submarines blocked escape to the south, and their main fleet lay between the British warships and their base. Nevertheless, Somerville steamed towards the point where his cruisers had been sunk, and was rewarded by picking up the greater part of their crews. A further victim to Japanese air power was to be the carrier *Hermes*. The Japanese planes meanwhile delivered their second air attack, this time against Trincomalee. Once more a Catalina, flown by Flight-Lieutenant " Tommy " Thomas, D.F.C., flashed back the warning, and then was shot down. A R.A.F. reception party awaited the Japanese raiders, and their losses over Colombo were repeated. The Japanese Fleet then withdrew, though on its way across the Bay of Bengal it fell in with an Allied convoy and destroyed it. The slaughter was watched by a helpless Wapiit biplane of the Indian Air Force whose radio had

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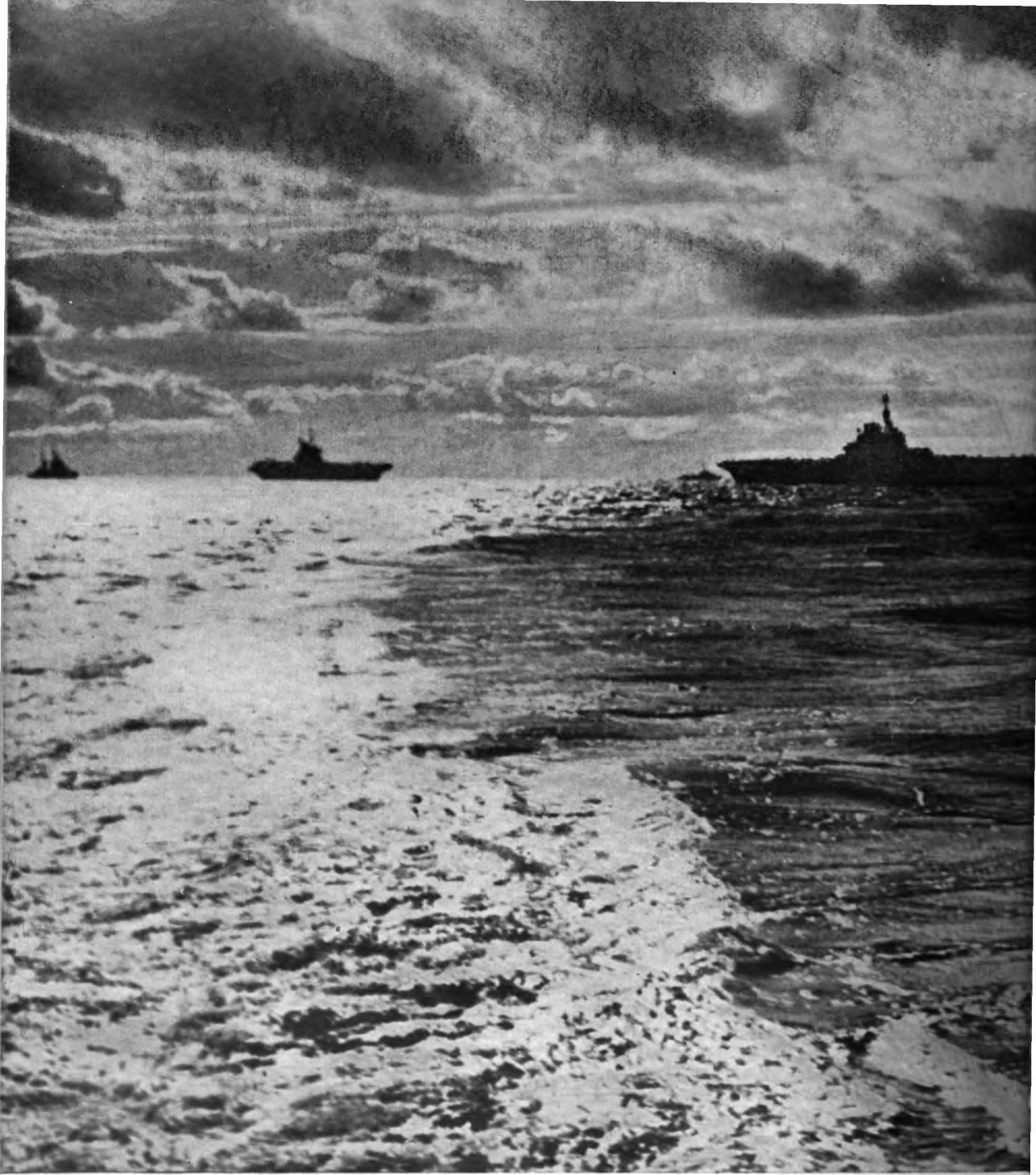

Across the broad face of the Indian Ocean stretched the power of the East Indies Fleet, a challenge to the enemy wherever he appeared. Here, returning at sunset from a raid on the Japanese naval base of Sabang, are the aircraft-carriers *Victorious* and *Illustrious*, the battleships *Queen Elizabeth*,

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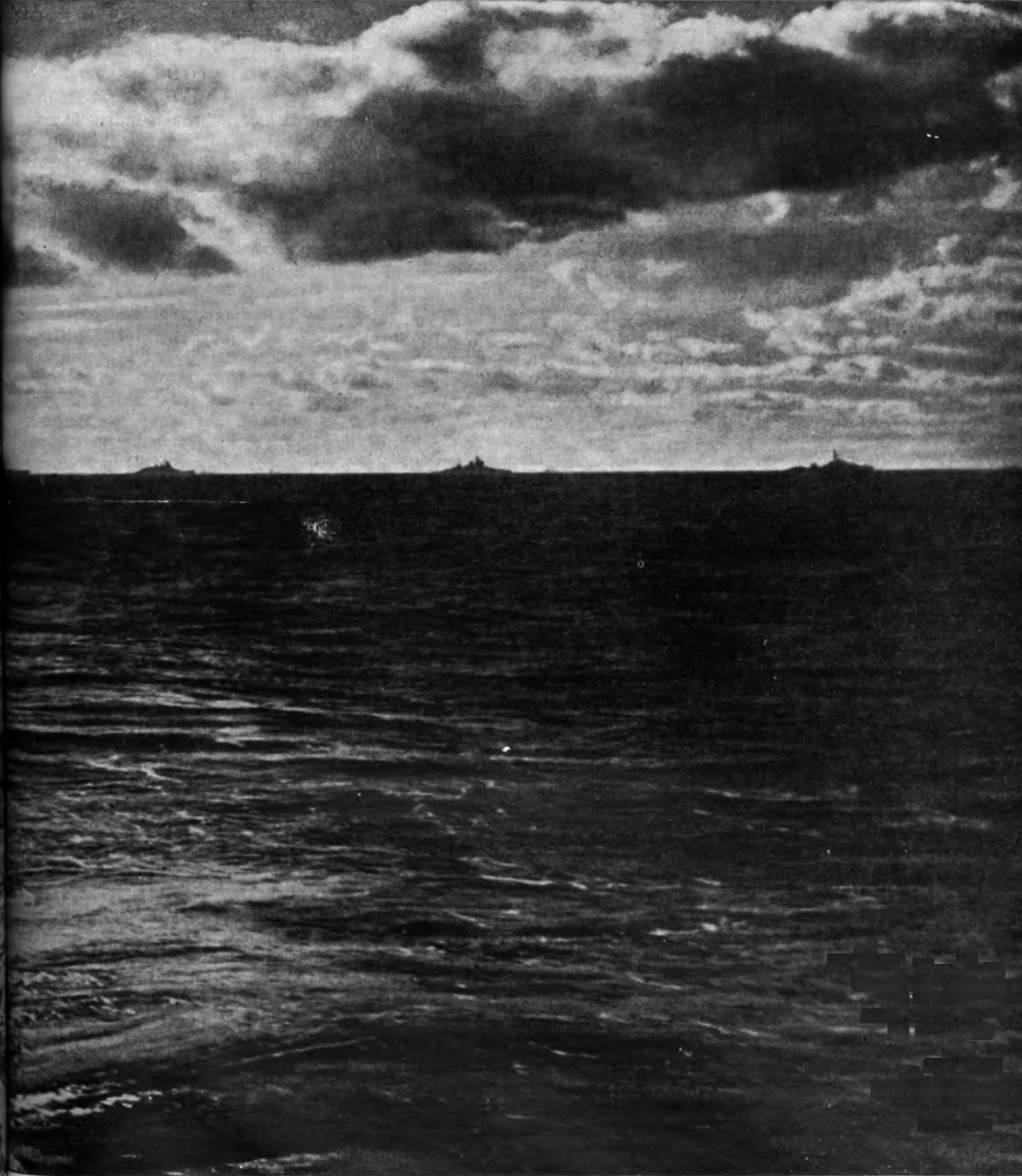

Richelieu and *Renown*, the cruiser *Black Prince*, and escorting destroyers. At first the enemy enjoyed naval superiority; in the end Admiral Sir Arthur Power dominated seven million square miles of sea until no Japanese warship dared show her flag in any water between Australia and South Africa.

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failed so that the pilot could not even report it.

The failure of the enemy to repeat Pearl Harbour lost him the unchallenged mastery of the Indian Ocean, for the British Fleet remained in being and the Japanese never knew its strength. But British air power was near the limit of exhaustion and the naval situation was black enough, despite the Fleet's escape. Happily, the vital supply routes (from Britain and America via the Cape of Good Hope to the Middle East and to India) lay in the western part of the Indian Ocean. If these could be kept open, all might yet be saved. It was considered wise to move the weakened fleet to Kilindini on the African coast to prepare for the next phase. Even there no dock facilities existed comparable with those at Singapore. Nor was skilled dock labour available. But under the direction of South Africa's Mr. Sturrock, Minister of Ports and Railways, thousands of the Union's railwaymen were rapidly trained in warship repair.

A further peril remained. The great island of Madagascar, off the coast of South-East Africa, was still in the hands of the Vichy French, who were prisoners of the enemy. There was a grave danger that they might let in the Japanese enemy as they had done in Indo-China. This peril passed when a Combined Operation under Rear-Admiral Syfret and Major-General Sturges, R.M., seized the Vichy French naval base at Diego Suarez. This substantially secured the shipping routes and made possible both the coming victories from El Alamein to Tunis and the building up of the Allied forces in India.

But the Battle of Supply extended far beyond the confines of the Middle Eastern campaign, and even of that threatened invasion which still hung as a thundercloud along the Burma border. The Army of India was crying out, indeed, for modern armament of every kind. So, too, and more so, was China, still fighting the common enemy, Japan, after five years, and still almost with bare hands. Mighty Russia, even, bowed before the Nazi fury, though she never broke. The tide of the German armies rolled to the foothills of the Caucasus, and beat upon Stalingrad. Russian valour and martial skill won that day, but Britain and America may take pride also that their factories cast so many of the victors' weapons and their faithful fleets carried them to Russia through the icy Arctic and the sweltering Persian Gulf. The heaviest part of this task was borne by the Merchant Navies, but each ship required escort through Indian Ocean waters, now infested with Japanese and German U-boats. To the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force fell the main duty of seeing the ships safe.

Until March 1945, German and Japanese submarines remained in the Indian Ocean, but the same technique of air-sea co-operation which gained the Battle of the Atlantic won the Battle of the Indian Ocean.

The Japanese increasingly suffered the liabilities of their far-flung conquests. For them, too, supply now became the overriding military problem, and without the corresponding capacity of their opponents to meet it. In Burma this defect was, by 1944, decisive. Here, under pressure by Fourteenth Army, the Japanese maintained a formidable army of 10 to 12 large divisions. To keep it supplied with arms and ammunition and transport strained the capacity of the Siam-Burma railway to its limits. Using the forced labour of prisoners-of-war, the enemy had built this railway, against all Allied expectation, within 18 months. Despite the unceasing attacks on it by the Allied air forces, it played a major part in maintaining his armies in the field.

The enemy had the best of the road layout in Burma, but even so it was barely adequate, for road transport, like the air, develops its own appetites. Petrol and machine parts must also be brought in. Every use, therefore, had to be made of sea routes. Since declaring war the Americans had sunk 750 cargo ships, so that by 1944 the Japanese had fallen back on ferry-boats, coasters, junks and sampans. Lumped together in grotesque partnership, these motley armadas crept down the China coasts and through the Malacca Straits towards Burma. Submarines of the Royal Navy and United States Navy picked them off as they came, sometimes at the harbour gates where they had loaded. Since it was reckoned that 100 tons of foodstuffs would keep a Japanese division in the field for six days, the value of these cargoes to the enemy may be appreciated. So thoroughly did the East Indies Fleet deny the Singapore-Rangoon sea route to the enemy, that in his task of supplying the Japanese forces in Burma he never was able to use the great port of Rangoon to within a fraction of its capacity.

Above Rangoon the situation was no better. As the roads became impassable in the monsoon —and the Japanese lacked mechanical road repair equipment such as bulldozers—much of

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his transport was driven back to the sea. But now it was within range of Allied shore-based aircraft. No. 222 Group R.A.F. had by this time based squadrons in Ceylon, Madras and Akyab, and soon would have one in the Cocos Islands. Catalinas and Liberators ceaselessly patrolled the Bay of Bengal and far southward, while fighters scoured the coasts and creeks. If now and again a ship or a junk slipped through, unloading its cargo into the smaller craft which could sneak under the cover of night up the Arakan shores into the rivers, another danger lurked for them. Operating from secret bases, light coastal units of the Royal Navy, Royal Indian Navy and South African Navy swooped on the unarmed craft and sank them under the nose of the Japanese shore positions.

The enemy could not replace his 700-odd sunken ocean-going cargo ships, but he might hope to keep a wooden coastal fleet in being. The Andaman Islands were ordered to produce the vessels. Royal Navy carrier-borne planes attacked the sawmills at Port Blair and left them blazing. While these troubles of supply were piling up, the Allied Fleet moved over to the offensive. From a fleet in being it became a fleet in action.

In April 1944 aircraft from British and American carriers, covered by powerful forces which included battleships, cruisers, destroyers and submarines, bombed the Japanese base at Sabang and Lho Nga airfield in North Sumatra. The dockyard, power station, wireless station, radar station, oil tanks, barracks and hangars were bombed, 24 aircraft destroyed on the ground, two merchant ships hit and two destroyer escorts set on fire. " We caught the Japs with their kimonos up and their heads down," said Admiral Somerville.

In May another composite fleet struck Sourabaya, main Japanese base in Java, steaming 1,500 miles into waters nominally commanded by the Japanese Navy. The bombing of the dry-dock broke up the enemy's ship-repair programme; the demolition of the engineering works, the sinking of 35,000 tons of shipping, and the burning of his oil stocks, cut short all hopes of an improved sea supply for his Burma armies. Then Sabang received its second hammering. A powerful fleet which included the battleships *Queen Elizabeth*, *Valiant* and France's *Richelieu*, the battle-cruiser *Renown*, with attendant cruisers and destroyers, sailed close in and pounded the harbour installations with 15-inch shells. The shore batteries were engaged by the cruisers *Cumberland*, *Ceylon*, *Nigeria*, *Kenya* and *Gambia*. A Dutch cruiser and three destroyers (British, Australian and American) entered the harbour and shot up shipping and port equipment at short range.

The East Indies Fleet redoubled its blows. When Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, G.C.B., K.C.B., succeeded Somerville as Mountbatten's Naval C.-in-C. in August 1944, the Indaroeng Cement Works in Sumatra, which were supplying cement for pillboxes and tank traps against the threatened Allied invasion, were laid in ruins by Fleet Air Arm Barracuda bombers. The railway repair depot at Sigli was also smashed. A simultaneous attack was launched against the harbour and railway installations at Emmerhaven. In October and November the Nicobar Islands were bombarded.

In November 1944, Admiral Fraser sailed away to the other side of the Japanese war. His mission was to build up and command the British Pacific Fleet. He was succeeded by Admiral Sir J. Arthur Power, K.C.B., C.V.O.

Changes in the command had not thrown the East Indies Fleet out of its stride of attack. The first months of the new command of Admiral Power were characterised by a series of blows at Japan's oil supplies, culminating in the strike by carrier-borne aircraft against the Palembang refineries in January 1945—an operation that eclipsed anything yet seen in the Far Eastern theatre. The carriers *Illustrious*, *Indomitable*, *Indefatigable* and *Victorious* took part. The devastation wrought at Palembang was a major disaster for the enemy, who had hitherto relied on these refineries for 75 per cent. of his aviation spirit.

By February 1945 the XV Corps was advancing down the Arakan coast. Owing to the necessity of giving absolute priority to the European and Pacific theatres over that of South-East Asia, the long-delayed amphibious craft had not yet reached the station. The East Indies Fleet improvised. By making do with craft which would have been on a scrap-heap in Europe a series of rapid amphibious operations were launched to aid the land forces in their progress southward. These culminated in the capture of Rangoon on May 2nd, 1945.

Subsequently, the Fleet's destroyers ranged the Andaman Sea, seeking out and sinking

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Japanese supply craft whenever they ventured out of port. If nothing better offered they called in at the Nicobar Islands and shot them up. The carriers, supported by Fleet units, in a series of operations in the Andaman Sea, forced the enemy into the air, with the result that heavy casualties were inflicted that considerably reduced the Japanese resistance to subsequent attack.

The air arm of this partnership was the "Indian Ocean Air Force," composed of reconnaissance aircraft from the Aden and East African Commands, and controlled by No. 222 Group R.A.F. There was also liaison with squadrons of the South African Air Force which were engaged in similar duties. One U-boat, reported off Madagascar, was chased by the Royal Navy and the Indian Ocean Air Force from East African waters, via the Seychelles Islands, towards Ceylon and destroyed after a week's pursuit off Sumatra. During the long defensive battle in the Indian Ocean Allied flying-boats rescued more than 1,000 survivors from lost ships. Another commitment of the Indian Ocean Air Force was to lay mines along the enemy's sea lanes. They laid about 1,000, often flying for a day and a night to make the round trip.

It was in May 1945 that the Japanese sought to make their last naval sally in South-East Asia, and it ended its brief term at the sally port. This action, which was fought by five British destroyers against an enemy cruiser mounting ten 8-inch guns, 16 5-inch guns and ten torpedo tubes, will rank as a classic destroyer attack upon a more powerful opponent. It had long been practised, and the practice achieved 100 per cent. success.

It was a British submarine on patrol between Malaya and the Japanese-held island of Sumatra which signalled to the destroyer flotilla that the *Haguro*, a 15,000-ton, 32-knot cruiser, was sailing along the Malacca Straits. Led by H.M.S. *Saumarez* (Captain M. L. Power, C.B.E., D.S.O., R.N.), the flotilla raced after her, and overtook her.

It was midnight and raining heavily as the British destroyers drew near. Screened by darkness and the storm, their approach was unobserved until they were within 10,000 yards, when *Haguro* challenged them by lamp. *Saumarez*, coming within range, opened up on her, drawing fire immediately from her eight- and five-inch armament. Soon *Haguro's* guns were depressed to their lowest level as she towered above her little assailants, but even so they only hit a piece out of the top of *Saumarez'* funnel. The rest of the salvoes passed harmlessly through the rigging.

Now developed an action which recalls that of Drake against the galleons of the Spanish Armada. Shell splashes from near-misses flooded the upper decks and drenched the bridges of the destroyers as they pressed the attack. By this time they had drawn a circle around *Haguro* at about a mile range, and the torpedo battle began.

Saumarez was hit by a shell, but launched her first torpedo accurately. The British crews saw the cruiser, silhouetted by tropical lightning, turning sharply to the southward to avoid it. A large flash showed that her manœuvre had been in vain. H.M. ships *Venus* and *Verulam*, which had approached almost simultaneously, put another torpedo apiece into her. Three explosions in *Haguro's* bows, stern and amidships lit up the target in a sheet of flame. She was listing 40 degrees to port when *Virago* and *Vigilant* closed in for the kill. "Finish her off," signalled Power from *Saumarez*, and the remaining torpedoes were launched against her.

Completely demoralised by the encircling fire, the Japanese gun crews were firing their short-range weapons into the air. As the cruiser sank *Venus* switched her searchlights on to the blazing hulk. They disclosed a pinnace being lowered full of officers and men. The sea was full of survivors, but the proximity of enemy airfields on Sumatra forbade rescue. The British destroyers drew off. Their casualties included only two killed.

The last naval blow against Japan came almost at the end of the chapter. On July 26th the British midget submarine XE.3 penetrated the mined Johore Strait, being towed 500 miles to the target area by the submarine *Stygian*, and there sank the Japanese heavy cruiser *Takao*. To avoid detection by the enemy's hydrophone posts, the midget deliberately left the safe channel and nosed through the minefield, passing the net-boom defences within a few feet of the guardship. At one point she actually lay doggo on top of a mine, which failed to explode. With her keel scraping the sea-bed, the submarine's diver then fixed his charges under the cruiser, and the midget crept away again to the open sea. A great hole was torn in *Takao's* hull and her turrets put out of action. For this daring deed

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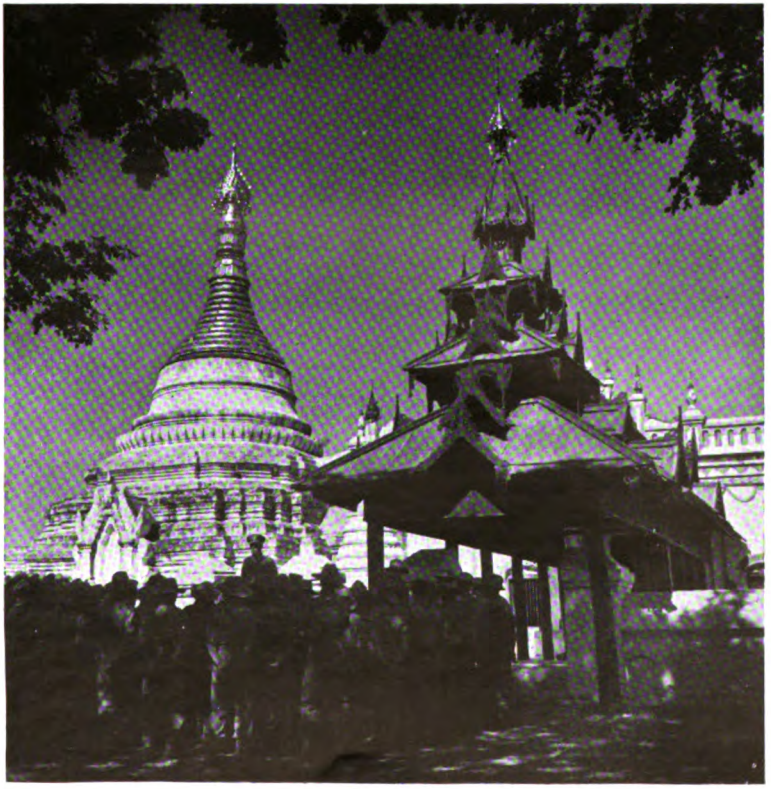
the Commander (Lieutenant Ian Fraser, R.N.R.) and the diver (Leading Seaman James Magennis) were awarded the Victoria Cross.

Such was the curtain to Japan's claim that she ruled the Eastern seas. But from early in 1944 the East Indies Fleet had sailed where it pleased in the waters allocated to it by the highest Allied Councils; it had sought out the enemy in his own sea lairs, and burned him out of them; it had convoyed stores and men unmolested to the ports it guarded; it was to set military invasions ashore at will on enemy-held coasts.

Two hundred thousand men under command performed this hard duty. Always, they worked with fewer resources than were, by reasonable calculation, requisite to do the job assigned to them. In Power's words, they "made do." Never did they fail to deliver to the land forces, in support, supply or assault, all that they had undertaken.

Such was the naval weapon which by August 1945 had been forged and tempered on the East Indies Station for the further campaign against Japan. Admiral Sir Arthur Power understood its use and potentiality as well as any man at sea, for he had trained it, commanded it in battle and directed it in strategy. He prepared to demonstrate its final worth against the Japanese Imperial Fleet, and of the outcome neither he nor any man under his command harboured the least doubt.

But Japan surrendered. The atom bomb was the last, as it was the most terrible, of all the levers of war that toppled the conquerors of the East to destruction within four years of their greatest triumph. The historian of this far-flung and many-fronted war will still surely write that sea power provided the foundations of victory, and that in this matter the East Indies Fleet played a splendid and decisive part.



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